

# The History of the N.U. High School Golf Team



*1968-2012*

## Author's Note

This work could not have been accomplished without the assistance of many people. I would like to thank all the former players, parents, and NUHS Athletic Boosters, who shared time with me, and provided either written or oral background stories. I am particularly grateful to those who were able to supply copies of news clippings and pictures. If I began to list all the people I should thank, I would likely forget a name or two, so I will only add the following.

I would have liked to include EVERY yearbook picture and story, every newspaper clipping, every picture, and every oral history legend, but I did not want the work to become a treatise... Rather, my intention was to make it a readable and enjoyable piece of MPLS memorabilia. I hope that the selections I made were a good cross section of the saga that is NUHS Golf.

I also tried to be as accurate as humanly possible, getting source information for the scores, records, and statistics from the original hand-written records kept by Jerry Duea, as well as from microfilm stories from local and regional newspapers. *All errors are mine alone.*

Lee Weber

# Golf at Northern University High School

The history of the golf program at NUHS is similar to the history of other sports, in that it is a story of triumph and tragedy. In NU High's case, the story falls into three distinct eras. First there was a period of growth and accomplishment; this was followed by a period of struggle and heartache; the final chapter was one of rebuilding and even greater accomplishment. But the story of high school golf competition at NUHS is much more than the story of wins and losses; it is the story of fathers and sons, and grandfathers and grandsons; and most of all it is the story of golf itself and all the special character traits of the game that are passed on from generation to generation. It is truly a story of laughs, tears, and love.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE JERRY DUEA ERA

In 1967, NUHS Principal Jim Albrecht visited with faculty member and fellow golf enthusiast Jerry Duea about the idea of starting up an NUHS Golf Team. Albrecht's son Mark and several other young men had expressed enthusiasm for the notion for several years. With Duea as their coach, five young men would become the first team to play competitively in the spring of 1968. Joe Griffith, who was on the team in 1968 and 69, remembers the very first practice. "We started inside in the old Fieldhouse, hitting short iron shots off the dirt track into hanging nets. Coach Duea also wanted us to run laps, but we didn't take that too seriously, and it didn't last long." Once outdoors, the team practiced at Washington Park GC, and played a few matches at the UNI course. (Neither course is in existence anymore.) When Pheasant Ridge Golf Course opened in 1972, the team moved to the new big 18-hole course. The wide open layout was a big change from the smaller tighter courses in the area where NU played most of its matches. Over the years this would prove a double-edged sword for NU High. When playing home matches, there was a big advantage over teams unaccustomed to the length of Pheasant and its many bunkers, but when NU played away at courses like Parkersburg, Eldora, Ackley, and La Porte City, the tight tree-lined venues became a difficult test of accuracy.



*The First Team: Front, Steve Wray; Back, Mark Albrecht, Coach Jerry Duea, Karl Anderson, Paul Sears (Not Pictured: Joe Griffith)*

After the first team finished second in both the NICL Conference Tournament and in the Sectionals in 1968, the enthusiasm for golf grew, and the team doubled in size in year two. They showed enough improvement in the spring of 1969 to win half of their regular season matches and again finish 2<sup>nd</sup> in the six-team NICL Tournament. It was just the beginning. Over the next decade, outstanding performances were turned in by players like Mark Albrecht, Steve Wray, Scott Lovejoy, Scott Johnson, Jeff Hutcheon, Walt Wilkinson, Kevin Mueller, Tim Sulentic, and brothers Dave and Doug Durbala, as NUHS went on to finish 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> in the NICL every year.

Included among the highlights of those early years was a remarkable NICL Championship at Gates Park in 1970. Steve Wray won medalist honors with a 74, while Mark Albrecht and Karl Anderson added a pair of 77's and Paul Sears shot 82. They established a major tournament mark of 310 that still stands as the best ever in NUHS history.



#### 1970 TEAM

*Front: Paul Sears, Steve Wray, Bob Dalziel, Mark Albrecht, Karl Anderson, Stan Nielsen.*

*Back Row: Duea, Scott Lovejoy, Paul Hansen, Alan Jessen, Tom Euchner, BJ (Bill )*

*Lovegren; Not Pictured: Keaven Anderson*

According to all accounts, Albrecht was the steadiest golfer and the team leader of those early teams, but Wray was perhaps the most talented; in later years he would go on to win numerous amateur titles in the area. He was also the team's most "interesting character." According to teammate Karl Anderson, the two were playing together one summer at Byrnes Park in Waterloo after a period of heavy rains. Not heeding warnings of possible flooding, they played "a few too many holes." Upon leaving the course, their vehicle was nearly carried away by rising water. Another teammate, Scott Lovejoy, told another Steve Wray story:

*I wasn't there, since I was a freshman, but my favorite story was in a tournament at Ackley; it was a tight finish where we should have won. But I heard about Steve Wray hitting a shot into the creek on the last hole. He elected to try to play it out of the creek.....but failed. (He might have even tried a second time). Then he took a penalty stroke and we lost by one stroke...Man, was the team mad at him, but they all loved him too. So it became one of those stories.....*



*Steve Wray*

Other teammates related similar tales about Wray, some of which have achieved mythical status over the years but cannot be documented.

In 1971, even with Wray and Albrecht graduated, another NICL title seemed assured for NUHS at Pine Lake Golf Course in Eldora, except for a fluke event. NUHS was in the lead by a stroke, with only Mark Lounsberry left on the course. After two good shots on the long par five finishing hole, Mark only needed a short pitch to the green and a two-putt to secure victory. Out to “support him” came buddy Scott Lovejoy. Scott told his teammate the situation and put unnecessary extra pressure on his friend; Lounsberry took five more shots to finish and NU was nipped by one shot for the title. Coach Duea was not happy, but he wasn’t upset with Lounsberry...it was Lovejoy who took the wrath of the coach. Lovejoy accepted all the blame, admitted his foolishness, and supported his normally dependable teammate.



*Scott Lovejoy*

He more than atoned for the mistake, by making history two years later. Shooting an incredible one-under-par 69 in the 1973 District Tournament at Sumner, Lovejoy led NUHS to the District Title and its first trip to the state tournament, which was then a one-day event at Atlantic Country Club.

Lovejoy’s one-under-par mark District Tournament record would remain unequaled for 36 years. Other team members on that 1973 state meet team included Lounsberry appropriately, as well as Scott Johnson, Ross Porter, and Jon Euchner. Lovejoy, who played as a freshman in 1970 and a senior in 1973, compared the two great teams...

*As good as our team was in 1973, I think the 1970 team was better due to having a lot more depth. My neighbor, Paul Sears was on that 1970 team along with Steve Wray, Mark Albrecht, Karl Anderson, Keaven Anderson, Alan Jessen, Stan Nielsen and Bob Dalziel. I was a 98 pound freshman who couldn’t hit the ball past 150 yards, but I did it every time. I was a guaranteed 45 (bogey golf) on every round, but never any better! Years later Paul told me that the seniors were worried I could qualify for a meet if several had a bad day, so they made a rule, he said, to not allow freshmen to qualify for varsity meets. I thought that was very funny to hear. They knew they had a great team. Strong seniors and juniors, with approximately nine that could qualify for any meet.*





*1973 Team: Ross Porter, Steve Van Hauen, Tom Williams, Matt Sindlinger , Mark Lounsberry, Scott Johnson, Scott Lovejoy, Jon Euchner, Coach Duea*

Bragging rights for the 1970 team aside, the 1973 team will always have a special place in NUHS History, as the first team to play in a state tournament meet...but it wouldn't be the last.

In 1974, after many of his teammates had graduated, Scott Johnson went on to have a great individual senior season, winning medalist honors at both the NICL and the Sectional, and then placing second in the District Tournament to advance as an individual to the state meet, where he finished 11<sup>th</sup>.



*Scott Johnson*

Several close calls in post season play followed in the years 1975-77, but in 1978, a talented team seemed destined to make it to the state meet. Then tragedy hit as Walt Wilkinson, the medalist from the Sectional Tournament, dislocated his shoulder in a rugby match the weekend before Districts. It probably was the deciding factor in the team not advancing. The team bounced back in 1979, becoming the second team in school history to win a trip to the state tournament, now being played as a two-day event at the difficult Finkbine Golf Course in Iowa City. Kevin Mueller was the top player on that team, establishing multiple school records, most of which would stand for two decades.

NU High's team score of 663 in the 1979 State Meet was the best score ever recorded by an NUHS team at Finkbine Golf Course. NUHS would finish 3<sup>rd</sup> in the team race. It could have been even better, but misfortune hit star Mueller on his first tee shot. Mueller recalls, "During the first round at the State I started on #9 at Finkbine. There was a large pine tree that during the practice round I hit my driver over and was about 120 from the green. I thought I hit the same shot, but the ball ended up in the tree branches. Needless to say the first nine holes didn't go as planned." Dave Durbala had a great tournament and led the team with a score of 161, good for 5<sup>th</sup> place individually. Mueller finished right behind, with 162, good for 8<sup>th</sup>. Other team members on that state meet included Tim Sulentic, Doug Durbala, and Todd Tracy. Dave Durbala recalls playing on those Mueller led squads...

*Kevin was one of the longest hitters I have ever seen. He didn't always have the greatest control, but his game was ideal for Pheasant Ridge and many of the smaller courses we played in those days. I think he actually intimidated some players because of how far he could hit it.*

*Tim Sulentic (we called him "Stretch") was a really solid number two player and I played third. My brother Doug was probably the no. four player, but Dura would not put me and my brother in the same group because we would get that sibling rivalry-thing going, so Doug played fifth and the other junior on the team (Todd Tracy) usually played fourth. Jim Hayes was normally sixth.*



*Tim Sulentic and Kevin Mueller*

Sulentic added, "Mueller was a damn good player who drove me to be better. His competitiveness still burns and more times than not he still beats me by a shot. By the way, did I mention Mueller was one tough SOB to beat?"

It should be noted that the fortunes of NUHS golf in the 1970's and 80's were marked by forces not entirely in the hands of the coaches or athletes. As school consolidations began to take hold in Iowa, competition in high school golf changed dramatically. Most of the schools that NUHS competed against grew larger, but NUHS did not, due to its special status as part of Malcolm Price Laboratory School. The creation of schools like Aplington-Parkersburg, Ackley-Geneva, Eldora-New Providence, Gladbrook-Reinbeck, and Union High School in La Porte City, made area competition tougher than ever. Conversely, at the same time, the Iowa High School Activities Association broadened golf competition in 1977. They changed the scoring format so that teams could now enter six players instead of five in all matches, although they still would count only four. They also moved from the original two classes of competition to three classes in 1977, and then to four classes

in 1982. The results were predictable; after 1980, NU High would win only five more NICL titles; but would become a consistent contender in the post season, winning ten Sectional titles and advancing to the state tournament seven more times.

While the Duea era established NUHS as a winning golf program, the players remember more than just the victories. Paul Creeden, who played from 1974-77, remembers one of those years with a smile.

*Denny Kettner coached that year, as Duea took a year off to complete his Ph.D. work. Kettner had been an outstanding athlete, playing football and golf for UNI, and later coaching football at NU High. He tried to get the team to work out, lift weights, and run in the pre-season. We didn't take the new regimen too much to heart, but we continued with solid tournament performances just the same, finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> in the NICL and 2<sup>nd</sup> in Sectionals.*

With Duea back the next year the team again finished 2nd in the NICL and in Sectionals; in Districts they missed out in going to state by one stroke, as did individual golfer Jeff Hutcheon. According to Creeden, Hutcheon was a terrific high school golfer, but was a bit unlucky to never qualify for a state meet in the years when a player had to finish first or second to advance.



*Jeff Hutcheon*

The Duea years were not just about the golf, though. Among the many stories of those years were the memories about traveling with the Coach. Before the Minivan Revolution of the mid 1980's, golf transportation was a little different than it is today. The team wasn't going to get a 40-passenger school bus; so Coach Duea drove his personal panel station wagon.



Of course, that meant a freshman or a rookie had to sit in the rear facing seats with all the golf bags; but things could be different on the way home. Scott Lovejoy remembers the station wagon trips...



*If you “scored” (top 4), you got a seat in the car on the way home. If not, you had to be in back, I guess it had to be with the clubs! On our team, it was nearly always Scott Johnson, Mark Lounsberry, Jon Euchner and me who would score. But, I recall one tournament where Mark had a bad day and Steve Van Hauen, with a 49, had the 4<sup>th</sup> counting score. Steve was saying things like the “rookie starred” as a potential headline in the Cedar Falls Record (newspaper). Mark Lounsberry, a character anyway, was in rare form from the backseat with the clubs giving everyone in earshot a piece of his mind. Not happy.*



*Mark Lounsberry*

Dave Durbala added a memory about the comradery of that 1979 State Tournament team:

*We were a good team in the sense that we tended to do other things together (such as, most of these guys were the core of a weekly poker game that lasted for years). A couple of my favorite stories from that year: I remember at the conference meet at La Porte City, I saw Sulentic celebrating the fact that he holed out a wedge on a short par-5. I yelled across to him, assuming it was an eagle. He said no, it was a par. He apparently topped four shots in a row and then holed out for par. Go figure.*

*Duea's biggest mistake with this team was when, at the state meet, he took us to one of the family dining places in the Amanas to eat. Six high school boys in an all-you-can-eat restaurant. I wonder how long they stayed open. LOL.*

When reminded about the meet Durbala described, Sulentic responded, “To this day my favorite club is my 8 iron going back to the infamous La Porte shot heard around the NICL.”



*1979 State Tournament Team*

*Front: Dave Durbala, Toddy Tracy, Doug Durbala.*

*Back: Duea, Jim Hayes, Tim Sulentic, Kevin Mueller, Asst. Coach Kim Foss*

Nearly all former players remember Duea fondly, particularly his love for the game. Most smile when they picture Jerry's swing, and recall that there were always players who could beat Jerry's scores, but they never knew the game like he did. They also remember that he tried to impart that knowledge to players, especially the inexperienced ones. On practice days Coach Duea would play with the team, and stress sportsmanship, and acting like a gentleman. Curt Nielsen, a 1981 NUHS graduate, reflected on Jerry's coaching this way:

*He would always preach to us that we needed to improve our short game... "that's where the strokes are," he would say. Of course, he was right, but that didn't keep us from going to the driving range and trying to hit our drivers as far as we could. Jerry would also always make us do things "the right way." In a day when golf bags were big and cumbersome, we had to carry our bags over our shoulders, "not like luggage." We wore golf shirts, not tee shirts, and we had to learn the rules and the etiquette of the game. That was just as important as our scores.*

In the Duea era, many players lived within walking distance of the school. Living across the street from Duea, Paul Creeden witnessed several players who were invited to Jerry's back yard for some extra work. Creeden remembers himself and others were the recipients of many swing tips ("instant lessons" as we called them) during practices and sometimes at school. Coach Duea had a great interest in the golf swing and was always trying to make us better." Kevin Mueller added, "Duea was a very big man standing 6' 4" (Reminded me of Andy Bean), but a he had a very good putting touch. He taught me how to putt. We spent many hours working on my putting grip and today I still refer back to those lessons on my putting stroke."

Duea would retire at the end of the 1982/83 school year, but he remained an avid supporter of the golf program. He was instrumental in the success of his grandson, Jalen Bergman, who was a member of the 2008 team that won NU High's only state championship. Jerry was stricken with cancer in 2009; that year the team managed to get a personal letter sent to him by golf legend and cancer survivor Arnold Palmer. Jerry would pass away the next year, and the team would dedicate its season to him. No doubt, he was watching over his grandson, as Jalen qualified as an individual for the state tournament. ***Coach Duea, you will be missed but never forgotten.***

## **CHAPTER TWO: TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS**

Scott Justice would coach for three years immediately following Duea's retirement. His teams won an NICL title (1985) and two more Sectional Titles (1985, 86), but soon after that the team's fortunes waned. The reasons are multiple and interrelated. High School golf in the 1980's, like tennis, was still labeled a "minor sport" compared to football, basketball, track, and baseball. This was particularly true in many small high schools, where most athletes participated in three or even four sports. Many a football coach, who had learned his craft in the days of Vince Lombardi and "Bear" Bryant, simply had an unwritten rule..."You go out for track in the spring, so you can stay in shape." In addition, many times the football coach was an assistant track coach. Peer pressure from fellow athletes added to the atmosphere.

Never was that more true than at NU High in the years from 1983 to 1991. NU Football and Basketball programs had outstanding athletes and great success; and the boys track program, developed by Hall of Fame track coach Bob Lee, would bring home six state championships over a ten year period. Whether lured by other players, or strongly urged by coaches, few athletes opted to go out for golf. Matt and Mike Green remember well. They were the sons of Ken Green, who was the UNI varsity men's golf coach. Teaming up with two excellent holdovers from the Duea era, they formed the nucleus of one of the best golf teams in NU History. Mike Green's memories tell the tale well:

*Scott Justice was awesome. He was a great guy who knew the game. He was fun to be around and got after you if you were screwing around. Because he was an outstanding golfer, you listened to him. We had two really good seniors in Fred Krohn and Tom McGee. Then you had my brother and me. That was a really good top-four. You have to remember that this was the era where Coach Lee and the NU High track team were winning state titles. Frankly, he didn't like that people didn't go out for his track team, so our golf team was kind of looked downed upon. That bothered us, because we loved golf and we were good. I remember when we won the NICL meet, which I think was the first golf title for NU in quite some time, Fred, Tom, and all of us, drove over to Coach Lee's house to drop off the trophy! He actually got a kick out of it....*

*In 1985 we won every regular season match, the NICL, and sectionals by 18 shots. We were all excited for districts and we felt unstoppable. Unfortunately, I was an idiot and tried to slide into home plate in P.E. softball and broke my wrist. This was a mere three days before districts. I was devastated. To this day, I will never forget when Fred and Tom came over to my house that night to lift my spirits. I started bawling. I felt I let them down, especially as seniors. (The team would miss out by six shots using one counting score of an 87, while Mike consistently had turned in scores in the 70's in major tournaments.)*

*In 1986, with Matt and I back, we had a decent team, but we were lacking in other golfers. It was probably my best year...we won sectionals again; next was districts at Tripoli. We got sixth and didn't make it. I finished second with a 75 to qualify for state as the runner-up. I finished 5<sup>th</sup> individually but I remember feeling awful for my brother for not making it. He was a helluva golfer, but most people don't realize how hard it is to make it to state as individuals. My last two*

*years I didn't have much fun. I lost my brother to graduation, who had challenged me every day in practice and in tournaments. There was nobody else on the team who really cared about golf.*



### *1985 Team*

*Front: Mike Green, Todd Michel, Kurt Schilling, Jerry Engleman*

*Back: Matt Green, Wade Anderson, David Deifs, Tom McGee, Fred Krohn*

*I remember in back-to-back nine-hole dual meets I won medalist honors with a pair of 37s and there wasn't another score we counted under 50. It was miserable. In 1987, I got second at sectionals again to advance to districts at Tripoli. This time, I fell short. For some inexplicable reason, I hit an approach shot to a green that wasn't the correct one. I had to take a drop and got a bogey, which proved to be the deciding shot on missing out in a playoff to make state again.*

*I didn't play very well my senior year. No excuses. I finished runner-up at the NICL meet at Pheasant Ridge and it still bothers me today. The only thing memorable about the season was one time getting back from a tournament I was so disgusted with my putter I tied it to the back of my car and dragged it home. NOT one of my finer moments and my Dad wasn't very happy with me! I didn't make it out of sectionals this time.*





*Mike Green*

Mike's graduation in 1988 would be the last hurrah of the era, as NUHS would fail to place higher than 3<sup>rd</sup> in the post season for the next seven years. After Justice left the program, four different coaches would lead the NUHS golf program in the next five seasons. All four were "good guys" according to their players, but none were faculty members, and often they were not well versed in golf as a sport. In one yearbook story about the golf program at that time was this quote, "Mike Green was our number one golfer, and sometimes (more often than not) he took over the coaching duties." With no faculty member eager to take the reins, the program suffered from a lack of continuity and motivation to succeed. The team often did not practice in difficult weather conditions, and team victories became less frequent. By the end of the era only six players were on the team and the team member who wrote the yearbook story was quoted as saying,

*Yes, we did lose every meet we played in, but we also witnessed steady improvement...memories, too, were made this year, including the Parkersburg meet where ----- was disqualified, the Sectional meet where ----- was disqualified, and the Oelwein meet, where nobody showed up!*

Needless to say, rebuilding the NUHS golf program would take some major work.

### **CHAPTER THREE: A RETURN TO GLORY**

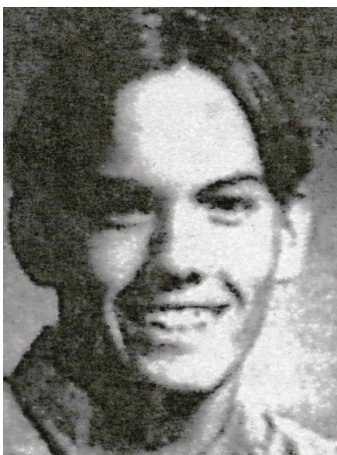
When Lee Weber interviewed for a teaching position at MPLS in the summer of 1991, he met Athletic Director Paul Waack. Wanting desperately to have a faculty member bring some stability to the program, Waack offered Weber the coaching job on the spot, and asked if there was anything Weber might be requesting from the budget. Waack offered to buy shirts, jackets, or bags for the teams. Weber responded, "Paul, we are going to be playing spring golf in Northeast Iowa, right? Could you buy us some rain suits instead?" Waack did purchase eight suits for the team, and, needless to say, the holdovers from the 1991 team would be in for the shock of their lives the next spring.

Practicing in the rain, practicing in high winds, practicing in the cold, and, yes, practicing in the snow, was a new experience for these NU athletes. So was passing a difficult written rules test before they could play. Only one senior was on that team; it didn't take him long to have a chat with Weber. Weber remembers the words like they were yesterday. "Coach, you don't seem to understand...golf at NU High is sort of a *club sport*; we don't take it too seriously." But Weber would lead a turnaround in the program by example. The coach, often in three layers of clothes, a stocking cap, and mittens, would never send the team out if he was

going to stay in the clubhouse. It was a philosophy that would take time to be welcomed by players, but eventually it would make all the difference in the world...but that is a story for later.

Weber's first teams struggled to compete, but made steady improvement. The team's season scoring average, which began at 212 in 1992, dropped 20 points the next year, another 10 strokes the third year, and another 10 strokes in year four. Matt Wertz and Clayton Lichty, two freshmen in Weber's first year, along with transfer student Dan Bolin, would become NU High's first medal winners in six years in 1994. Golf at NUHS was back, and a Sectional win in 1996, followed by an NICL victory in 1997, cemented the comeback. But it was not easy. While NUHS was getting better, it seemed everyone else in the district was too. In a 15 year span from 1997 through 2011, the state champion came from NU High's District an amazing 12 times, and the runner-up an additional 6 times. Great golf teams from Grundy Center, Sumner, Mason City Newman, and Algona Garrigan made advancing to the state meet extremely difficult.

In 1996 and 97 NUHS was led by Nic Moran. Moran would eclipse a number of the scoring records of Kevin Mueller, which had stood for 18 years. In his senior year, he finished second in the NICL, 3<sup>rd</sup> in Sectionals, and tied for 2<sup>nd</sup> in the District.



*Nic Moran*

Unfortunately, only two qualifiers could advance from each District, with no ties; a sudden death playoff often meant one golfer playing for himself against another golfer who was already going to the state meet with his team. Playing in just that situation, Nic came up short. Coach Weber was a critic of the playoff rule, and he lobbied the Association for a change. It would come two years later, allowing all players who finished 1st through 4<sup>th</sup> including ties to advance.

Playing with Moran in 1997 were three talented freshmen, who became the face of the new era Panthers. Kody Asmus, John Michel, and Zach Buck would help rebuild NU High into a major high school golf power. In 1998, NU went back to the state meet for the first time in two decades. They finished 6<sup>th</sup> that year and 3<sup>rd</sup> in 1999, with Asmus leading the way as Sectional and District champ.



### *1999 State Tournament Team*

*Front: John Michel, Zach Buck, Shaun Reed*

*Back: Coach Weber, Alan Johnson, Kody Asmus, Kevin Conner*

In 2000, the team had high hopes of a state title, but misfortune came their way. First, the State meet was moved to a new venue, at Otter Creek Golf Course in Ankeny. With two years' experience playing at Finkbine, this was the first bad omen. Then the first day of the meet, it was raining lightly and meet officials first delayed, then cancelled the first 18 holes of competition. This was particularly unfortunate for a team like NUHS, who had solid #5 and #6 players who could offset a bad outing by any of the top four. Then there was the final straw. Kody Asmus remembers it this way...

*I hyper-extended my elbow during PE sometime in April. I had PE 2nd hour so the grass was still wet; I slipped on the grass and bent my elbow the opposite way. I remember trying to practice that day and was damn near crying in the bathroom out at Pheasant Ridge after the third hole. I walked off the course, went to the emergency room and was in a sling for almost two weeks. I know the first meet I came back for was our last meet before conference, sectionals, etc. It was a triangular at La Porte City and the only reason I remember this is because it was the only time in HS my score didn't count for us.*

Kody's stroke average after the injury was nearly two strokes higher than before. Meanwhile his teammates all saw averages go down with beautiful golf weather that May. It is very reasonable to assume that a healthy Kody Asmus would have finished the season somewhere on the "top ten" scoring average record board...and...as for the state meet...who knows? Still, he was the emotional leader of a group that achieved an amazing three-peat... a third consecutive state meet appearance, finishing 4<sup>th</sup> behind great individual performances by John Michel and Alan Johnson, who succeeded Asmus as Sectional and District Champion. Johnson's scoring average his junior year would also pass Kevin Mueller for second all-time right behind Nic Moran.

With the "three amigos" gone, the 2001 season would belong to Johnson, who repeated as Sectional Champ but came up one stroke short in the District Meet, and missed out on a 4<sup>th</sup> trip to state. That year would



also be remembered for the infamous “blizzard match.” Hosting top rivals Hudson and Grundy Center at Pheasant Ridge on a cold and blustery day, Coach Weber had to decide on playing or canceling due to weather. He made his decision about noon, as temperatures held in the mid 30’s and the wind-chill was in the 20’s. The match would go on, despite the fact that every other sporting event in Northeast Iowa would soon be cancelled. Unfortunately, the weather worsened in the afternoon, and by the time teams teed off, the wind chill was in single digits and snow flurries were all around. Weber passed out extra stocking caps and mittens to NU High golfers and to opponents as well. Scores were predictably awful. Weber was needled about the match for years by son Dan, who claimed he played the last six holes without taking his mittens off; it probably ruined Johnson’s chances of lowering his scoring average record, too.



*2003: NUHS All Time Scoring Record Team  
Blake Hibben, Joe Wartick, Jake Iversen, Dan Weber*

When reminded about the day, Coach Weber would just smile; he knew that someday, playing in such conditions would be rewarded. Weber’s dreams would be aided by perhaps the greatest collection of golf talent in NUHS history, led by NU’s best player ever. Blake Hibben would show his potential as a 9<sup>th</sup> grader in 2002, winning an individual NICL championship. The next year, he would team up with junior Dan Weber, and seniors Joe Wartick and Jake Iversen, to help NU High to its 6<sup>th</sup> berth in the state tournament. Along the way the group would set NU High’s all-time season scoring mark.

In his sophomore season Hibben finished 9<sup>th</sup> at State; in 2004 he returned to the state meet, finishing 3<sup>rd</sup> individually. His senior campaign in 2005 would blow the top off the record books, establishing a scoring average that would never be equaled. He won medalist honors in every major tournament, including the state meet at Otter Creek, where he bested the field by a full four shots. There is little debate that he was NU High’s best ever.

The golf team made a somewhat surprising return to the state meet in 2005, too, with a mix of veterans and young golfers including Ben Davidson, Alex Stone, Brian Kramer and Kenton Engels. Also on the squad was talented 9<sup>th</sup> grader Ben Peterson, who would work his way deep into the NUHS record books, too; but his legacy would primarily be as the leader of the last great team in NUHS Golf history.





*2005 Team, Led by Blake Hibben, Front and Center*

*Front: Ben Woods, Jordan Bachman, Joe McKenna, Hibben, Ben Peterson, Joel Brumm.  
Back: Assistant Kyle Nielsen, Ben Davidson, Kenton Engels, Brian Kramer, Weber. Alex Stone*

After qualifying individually for the state meet in 2006 as a sophomore, Peterson led the NU High team to a new state tournament locale, at the Spring Valley Golf Course in Livermore in 2007. The team finished 6<sup>th</sup>, and was a favorite to return the next year, but the road would not be easy. East Buchanan was in the same Sectional and was the top rated team in the state; NU won, but East Buchanan finished second and advanced, as well. The District meet was hosted by Mason City Newman, who was rated second in the state. That meant three teams could advance if Newman finished first or second. True to form, all three heavyweights advanced to a state meet that would have one of the most thrilling finishes ever in Iowa State History.



*2007 Team*

*Front: Ben Peterson, Thomas Creeden, Emmett Fritz  
Back: Kenton Engels, Jalen Bergman, Coach Weber, Andy Tallakson*

Golf, they say, is sometimes almost a spiritual event, where karma, fate, or something more magical plays a role. So it was in 2008. Senior Peterson was the grandson of longtime NUHS administrator and coach Jim Kelly; junior Thomas Creeden was the son of a former Jerry Duea player, Paul Creeden; sophomore Jalen Bergman was the grandson of Jerry Duea; and freshman Joe Weber, was Coach Weber's second son to play for NU High. With sophomore Emmett Fritz and freshman Andrew Stone, the team seemed destined for something special.

The weather forecast for the first day of the Memorial Weekend was for unusually cold temperatures and brisk winds. Decked out in stocking caps and rain suits, the team played solidly and finished the day tied for third with Newman, trailing favorite East Buchanan by seven shots, and three shots behind Newell Fonda. Wet, cold, and tired, all the teams went to their motels for hot showers, food, and rest. The next day was supposed to be better...but when teams woke up and looked out their windows they saw more rain, and the wind was still blowing. When the team arrived at the course, Weber found most teams' players, coaches, and fans grumbling. Expecting to have their state tournament appearance be a reward for a great season, it looked like it would be a punishing ordeal. (The wintry weather would cause the winning team score to be the second highest in state history.) Weber could only smile, as he remembered all the practices that were preparing this team for this moment. On the second day of competition many team scores went up, including first day leader East Buchanan, but Newman and Newell Fonda cut strokes off. NU was in the thick of it as the day wore on.



*Coach Weber at State Tournament 2008*

The tournament was nearly complete, as Weber, sitting on the ground on the downwind side of the clubhouse to tally scores, heard Mike Peterson come running..."Coach, we may have a problem," he said. Mike's son Ben was playing in the final group, battling defending state champion Jonathan Tink for medalist honors. A crowd of about 100 people were watching as the group approached the severely sloped green. They watched in dismay as Peterson's golf ball started to shake in the wind and then roll down the hill away from the flagstick. When he heard the story, Weber actually was relieved...his response was simple, "No problem; Ben knows what to do."

Indeed he did. He calmly putted from the new location, knowing that he could not replace the ball after it had been moved by the wind. He would finish as runner-up to Tink; it would then take a rules committee nearly a half hour to interview Ben, his fellow competitors, and several other witnesses, before they agreed to what the Coach already knew. How important was Ben's action on the 18<sup>th</sup> green? NUHS would win their only state championship by one stroke over two other teams. Had Ben moved his ball and been penalized two strokes, NU would have settled for third.



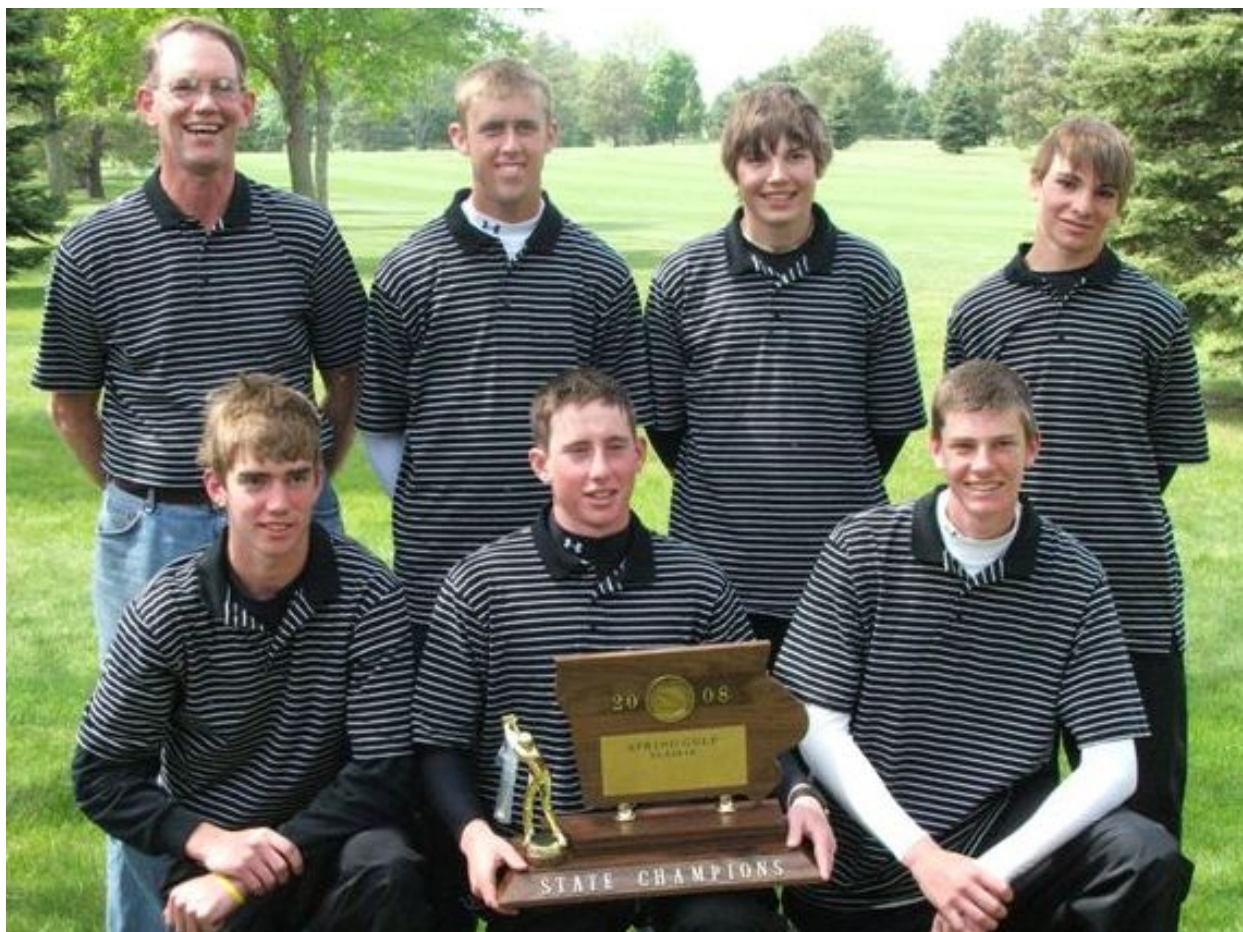
*Ben Peterson*

Later, at a season-ending banquet, Weber said that the team had won their state title mainly because of three factors. First, they had family support; parents and grandparents had walked with players during many matches in the last few years, so having spectators watch them play at the state meet was nothing new; secondly, they won because they had prepared to play in any weather conditions; and third, they won because they knew the rules.

That banquet was symptomatic of the Weber-coached years. Early on Weber had abandoned the “pot luck dinner” awards ceremony in the school cafeteria that was so common for other sports. He opted instead for a nicer event at the Cedar Falls Brown Bottle Restaurant. Seniors were given gifts and on four special occasions, were presented with letters of support from Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, Tom Watson, and Tiger Woods.

Serious awards were handed out, of course; but Weber also started giving out gag awards. “Divot King” certificates rewarded players for some of the worst scores of the year. Other unbelievable events got their own special awards: Among the funniest: hitting the same tree three times in a row; three OB tee shots on the first hole of a tournament; tossing a club into a tree to retrieve a golf ball, only to get the club stuck in the tree; taking a golf stance that backed into an electric fence; and perhaps the greatest...falling into the water hazard at Pheasant Ridge. As years went on, gradually it became more of an honor to get a gag award than a serious award, as the stories that went with them created laughter and comradery. These awards often showed up later at graduation receptions alongside expensive plaques and trophies.





### ***2008 State Champions***

*Front: Joe Weber, Ben Peterson, Jalen Bergman*

*Back: Coach Weber, Thomas Creeden, Emmett Fritz, Alex Stone*

The banquets grew smaller in the last three years of Weber's tenure, as rumors about the possible closing of Price Lab School caused enrollments to drop. Golf team numbers and victories declined as well. But one final chapter of golf history was still to be written.

As a 9<sup>th</sup> grader, Weber's son Joe had alternated with sophomore Emmett Fritz as the #4 man on that 2008 state championship team. Weber would have a breakout season the next year. He won both the NICL and Sectional meets; then at Districts Weber fired a score of one-under par 71, to tie the three time state champ Tink for first place. He lost the playoff, but would go on to the state meet, finishing 10<sup>th</sup>. The next year, during his final regular season basketball game, Weber would tear his ACL. Faced with the decision of losing either his junior golf season or his senior football season, he opted to rehab his knee and wear a brace for the entire golf season before having surgery. Weber had a remarkable season and joined senior Jalen Bergman in advancing to state. Tied for the lead after shooting an even par 72 on day one, Weber struggled to a 79 on the second day, and was in obvious pain trying to bend down to read the greens. He finished 10<sup>th</sup> again, determined to get back one more time. After surgery and more rehab, Weber's senior year was sensational. In the state meet Weber would finish runner-up, joining Ben Peterson as one of only two NUHS golfers to achieve that mark. He would also record a hole-in-one at the state meet, only the seventh golfer in Iowa state history to do so. Weber is the only golfer in NUHS history to qualify individually for the state tournament three times, and he now owns nearly all the records that Blake Hibben does not.





*Joe Weber*

Coach Weber had already decided that the 2011 campaign would be his last. It would be the end of a twenty year stint as NU's coach, and it would be son Joe's final season. Weber's final banquet that spring saw a mini-reunion with former players who shared their memories...of laughs, of three-page long rules tests, of van trips with special "omens," of golf jokes,...and of course, memories of the most important Weber mantra of all...when players were on the first tee prior to starting a match, Weber's instructions would always be the same...."HAVE FUN!"

The golf team had one final season in 2012 under A.D./Coach Joe Smeins. Golfing under the impending doom of the closing of Price Lab School weighed heavily on the small team of eight players, but one interesting footnote to the season is in order. Smeins recruited the first girls to play. Hoping to build a tradition like the ones crafted in earlier times for the boys program, five girls competed for the first and only time in NUHS history.

NUHS golf history would end with Weber being honored by the Iowa High School Golf Coaches Association in 2013, when he was welcomed into their Hall of Fame. His acceptance speech paid tribute to all the players who made all the achievements possible. "All I really did was teach the rules of golf, teach proper etiquette, and teach sportsmanship the first two weeks of each season; after that I just got out of the way and I drove the van." Somewhere Jerry Duea was nodding, smiling, and thinking of trips in his old panel station wagon.



## Appendix I: NUHS Golf History Timeline

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1972: 2<sup>nd</sup> in NICL; Team moves to new Pheasant Ridge Golf Course  
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1974: NICL Champs, 2<sup>nd</sup> in Sectionals; Scott Johnson, Sectional Champ, 2<sup>nd</sup> in District, 11<sup>th</sup> State  
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1978: NICL Champs, Sectional Champs, Kevin Mueller NICL Champ; Doug Hansen NICL Runner-Up, Walt Wilkinson, Sectional Champ; Doug Hansen, Sectional Runner-Up  
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1980: NICL Champs; Dave Durbala, NICL Champ  
1983: Jerry Duea Retires after 16 years  
1984: Scott Justice becomes coach for three years; Runner-Up in Sectionals; Tom McGee, NICL Runner-Up  
1985: NICL Champs; Sectional Champs; Mike Green NICL Champ  
1986: Sectional Champs; Mike Green, Runner-up Sectionals; Runner-up District; 5<sup>th</sup> Place, State  
1987: Mike Green, NICL Champ; Sectional Runner-up; Coach Justice Retires  
1988: Jeff Ubben coaches two years, Mike Green, NICL Runner-up  
1990: Tim Quinn coaches one year  
1991: Tracy Johnson coaches one year  
1992: Coach Lee Weber hired  
1996: Sectional Champs; Nic Moran, NICL Champ, Sectional Champ  
1997: NICL Champs; Nic Moran, NICL Runner-up, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sectionals, Individual Season Average Scoring Record  
1998: Runner-up Sectionals, Runner-up Districts, 6<sup>th</sup> place State  
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2003: Sectional Champs, 3<sup>rd</sup> District, 5<sup>th</sup> State, All Time Team Scoring Average Record; Blake Hibben, District, 4<sup>th</sup>, State, 9<sup>th</sup>; Joe Wartick, NICL Runner-Up  
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2006: NICL Runner-up, Sectional Runner-Up; Ben Peterson, Sectional 3<sup>rd</sup>, District 4<sup>th</sup>, State 10<sup>th</sup>  
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2008: NICL Champs, Sectional Champs, Sectional Record of 312, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place Districts, State Champs; Ben Peterson, NICL, Sectional, and State Runner-up; Jalen Bergman NICL Champ, 8<sup>th</sup> State  
2009: NICL Champs, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place Sectionals, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place District, District Record of 311; Joe Weber, NICL Runner Up, District Runner-up, 10<sup>th</sup> state  
2010: Sectional Runner-up; Joe Weber, NICL Runner-up, Sectional Champ, 4<sup>th</sup> place District, 10<sup>th</sup> state Jalen Bergman, NICL Champ, Sectional 3<sup>rd</sup>, District 3<sup>rd</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, State  
2011: Joe Weber NICL Champ, Sectional Champ, District 3<sup>rd</sup>, State Runner-up, Hole-in-One at State, Runner-Up, Individual Season Average Scoring Record, Coach Lee Weber Retires  
2012: Coach Joe Smeins coaches first and only Girls Team at NUHS; MPLS/NUHS close.

## **Appendix II**

### **NUHS ALL-TIME GOLF RECORDS**

#### **TEAM RECORDS**

##### **STATE CHAMPIONSHIP TEAM:**

Spring Valley Golf Course, Livermore, 2008

Ben Peterson, Thomas Creeden, Jalen Bergman, Emmett Fritz, Joe Weber, Andrew Stone

##### **TEAM SEASON STROKE AVERAGE:**

Blake Hibben, Dan Weber, Joe Wartick, Jake Iversen, 2003, scoring average, 159.95

##### **DUAL/TRIANGULAR NINE-HOLE LOWEST SCORE: 147, Pheasant Ridge, 2008**

(Ben Peterson, Thomas Creeden, Jalen Bergman, Emmett Fritz, Joe Weber)

##### **RECORD TEAM SCORES IN MAJOR TOURNAMENTS:**

Conference Tournament: 310, Gates Park, Waterloo, 1970

Sectional Tournament: 312, Wapsie Ridge, Fairbank, 2008

District Tournament: 311, Pheasant Ridge, Cedar Falls, 2009

State Tournament: (All nine team finishes are recorded)

1st place, Spring Valley, Livermore, 2008, score 683

3rd Place, Finkbine, Iowa City, 1979, score 663,

3rd Place, Finkbine, Iowa City, 1999, score 670,

5th Place, Otter Creek GC, Ankeny, 2005, score 638 (Par 71, adjusted, 646)

5th Place, Otter Creek GC, Ankeny, 2003, score 650, (Par 71, adjusted 658)

5th Place, Otter Creek GC, Ankeny, 2000, score 319 (Par 71, adjusted 327)

(Shortened to one day only due to weather)

6th Place, Finkbine, Iowa City, 1998, score 674,

6<sup>th</sup> Place, Spring Valley, Livermore, 2007, score 680

13<sup>th</sup> Place, Nisha Hills, Atlantic, 1973, score 339...one day only

#### **STATE TOURNAMENT TEAMS:**

1973: Scott Lovejoy, Mark Lounsberry, Scott Johnson, Ross Porter and Jon Euchner

1979: Kevin Mueller, Tim Sulentic, Dave Durbala, Doug Durbala, Todd Tracy

1998: Kody Asmus, John Michel, Zach Buck, Alan Johnson, Ben Buck, Joe Ostby

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## INDIVIDUAL RECORDS

INDIVIDUAL STATE CHAMPION: Blake Hibben, 2005

INDIVIDUAL STATE RUNNER-UP: Ben Peterson, 2008; Joe Weber, 2011

SEASON STROKE AVERAGE (all score averages adjusted to a par of 36)

1. Blake Hibben	36.15	2005
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STATE TOURNAMENT, TWO DAY 36 HOLES:

Blake Hibben, 143, Ankeny, 2005 (par 71, adjusted score, 145)

STATE TOURNAMENT, ONE DAY SCORE

Blake Hibben, 69, Ankeny, 2005 (par 71, adjusted score 70)

CAREER RECORDS:

MOST MEDALIST FINISHES IN MAJOR TOURNAMENTS

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