



2017 got off to a sad start with death of the great John Jacobs OBE, our OGRO President and great friend. He was approaching 92 and so many reading this will be fully aware of his true impact on golf. In so many ways. In our opinion, he is one of the four most important figures ever in golf and his legacy will last until all golfers are extinct.

Take the time to read the words below, written by OGRO Chairman and Golf Features Editor, Colin Jenkins PGA, as you may not have realised who it was that helped you get into golf in the first place.

## Goodbye John - The Greatest Teacher in the World

John Jacobs OBE was a great friend to all golfers, and me.

John Jacobs was one of the big four. Also included in this group are Arnold Palmer, Seve Ballesteros and Tiger Woods. This is the group of the most influential golfing figures ever. The other three are the ultimate popularisers of the game and hugely influential players who inspired millions to take up the game, whilst Jacobs was the man who made their enthusiasm last with the principles of an enduring golf swing. Without John Jacobs, millions would have tried the game and given up; he allowed golfers of all abilities to play a more worthwhile game of golf and to improve their performance.

He was the principle designer of the modern golf swing and every golf professional worth their salt today will be the beneficiary of his clear thinking and the simple manner in which he defined the principles of the golf swing.

He fought hard for his principles and it was not easy to ensure that his logic was adopted throughout the world - it almost certainly cost him another Ryder Cup place. His forthright views were gaining considerable traction in the golfing press and he had the temerity to contradict Henry Cotton's view of the golf swing in an article he wrote. Cotton, a great man in some ways, was unable to rise above this and bitchily refused to pick Jacobs, despite him being by far and away the strongest candidate for inclusion in the team. Jacobs, much to his credit, did not complain and refused to disparage Cotton, despite the enormous disappointment that he felt at the time. John was the man behind the ball flight principles - the PGA's system of describing the flight of golf shots and this system has allowed thousands of professional teachers to unravel a golfer's swing problem and put them on the road to improvement. They seem obvious today, and despite some detailed investigation by the latest doplar radar ball tracking devices, they hold true today. Such clarity has not always been available, and Jacobs main desire was for clarity - both for the golf teacher, but most importantly for the golfer. A clear idea was easy to focus on. Before Jacobs, with some obvious exceptions, golf professionals operated more like clairvoyants, so the learning of the game was for many shrouded in mystery.

John was raised at Lindrick Golf Club, mainly by his mother - his father was the professional at Lindrick, but was gassed in WW1 and never got over the trauma. He became assistant at Hallamshire Golf Club and started to teach. After national service, he became the professional at Gezzira Sporting Club in Egypt and forged a great reputation as both a player and a teacher before being forced to flee with Rita, his wife, during the Suez Crisis.

As a club professional again in the UK, John became well known for his professionalism at Sandy Lodge, where he and Rita were fabulously happy for many years. He taught almost all the time, despite doubling the price of his lessons to non members twice during his spell there. He was stubborn and happy to argue his point with anyone when it came to the golf swing and was able to dispense his wisdom in a friendly, simple forthright manner, which did much to forge his reputation. He was the man to go to if your game went off. Although this was a happy time for the Jacobs family, he was not happy to be

hemmed in as a coach, having to repeat himself to unambitious club members, who just wanted to spend a little time patronising their star golf professional. He hated teaching people who were not really interested in playing their best and the thought of having to do his for the rest of his life prompted him to look around for the next step in his career.

John's great friend and mentor, the remarkable Laddie Lucas came to the rescue. Lucas was a distinguished amateur golfer and a war hero and was strongly involved in the greyhound racing industry. He proposed to create golf ranges in the middle of race courses and greyhound tracks. He asked John to head up the project and the first one being at Sandown Park, in Surrey. This was one of the first golf ranges in the country and there were many problems. Today, golf ranges normally do better in the summer months, when there are more people seeking to play golf. In the sixties, golf was only played by keen avid golfers, and they were fit to burst with frustration if they could not get onto their course due to light or weather conditions. The floodlit range at Sandown, and subsequent facilities, became swamped with keen golfers during the darker winter months, but were more or less deserted come the spring, when the core customers returned to the courses. John realised this was a major problem and also that those learning would quickly give up if they had nowhere to play. The nine hole course at Sandown was built in record time and is still a great fun course to play today. Golfers could now start and learn at Sandown Park, and begin their lives as golfers playing regularly, before moving on to join other courses. Economically this proved an irresistible mixture for the business and the revenue from club hire alone was prodigious. John Jacobs Golf Centres sprouted up in Newcastle, Dublin and Northampton, and dozens more would have followed had there not been a change in the structure of Athlon Sports, the holding company. To this day, many are still referred to as 'John Jacobs Golf Centres', despite changing their trading names over forty years ago.

John's work in making golf accessible to everyone drove him to be a great innovator - without his determination to provide inexpensive golf to the masses, the golf boom of the seventies would not have been as potent.

He started to give group lessons, particularly at Sandown, as this was the closest to his base (now at Lyndhurst in the New Forest). He would teach a line of people all waiting to be seen by the maestro, and usually take with him several of his assistant golf professionals who would learn from the diagnosis - explanation - demonstration process

that Jacobs always used when teaching. These assistant professionals would teach golfers at the various centres and go on to teach thousands of golfers in their own right. They learned how to spot the fault, explain the issue and show the golfer the corrective actions required to hit the ball better. All of this teaching could have been boring to some, but Jacobs did not dread a huge line of eager golfers - they wanted to improve and he wanted to help. He also was the most charming of men and loved the gentle banter of teaching. His manner was always warm and humorous and sometimes hilarious. This delightful 'light touch' was also copied and mimicked by his young PGA colleagues and the charm and skill of a great golf lesson has been passed on to today's teachers.

The PGA as an organisation was in a mess in the sixties and John was asked to come and sort out the problem. The gist of the issue was that the PGA represented both the club professionals and also the tournament players. Both sets of PGA members had a very different outlook on golf and needed completely different things from their organisation. Laddie Lucas could see how much John wanted to help PGA through this very difficult time, and so granted him permission to split his time and hold down two full time positions. Few other would have been able to accomplish either task, let alone both simultaneously.

Jacobs realised that tournaments were being scheduled in a haphazard manner and that the relationship with the sponsors was almost that of 'cap in hand.' To succeed, the PGA Players Division had to get greater prize money with a structure that allowed some income for those not in the top ten. Sponsors were vital, but they should not be allowed to dictate the terms for the event to detriment of its participants. In his first month, Jacobs lost several sponsors, as he laid out his plan for the future - many thought he was 'above himself': thank goodness, if that was so, because without Jacobs, the tour today would be a far weaker organisation. He quickly saw the potential in Europe and with his charm, reputation and contacts was soon able to forge lasting agreements with the Federations of most of the European nations. He was still coaching internationally until just a few years ago.

As a tour player and a past Ryder Cup player Jacobs could see that the Ryder Cup would be better if it included the whole of Europe. This would make for a better event, but also bond the new European Tour and its competitors together. It was Jacobs who suggested that Jack Nicklaus discuss this issue with the PGA President Lord Derby. The rest is history,

but I do not think that it can be doubted that the European element has enriched the Ryder Cup from an event so one-sided that Tom Weiskopf decided to go hunting instead of play in the event. Today it is the biggest event on the planet.

As part of Jacobs' crusade for more golfers, he made a series of television programmes in the early seventies for Yorkshire Television. In the Jenkins household, this became essential viewing early on Sunday morning and the clear instruction and interesting array of new golfers and celebrity guests made for great viewing. I shall always be indebted for the golfing shove that he gave my Dad and I over forty years ago. Queuing at 5 am for nine holes at the very ordinary Lullingstone nine hole, or Bromley Common, became the norm for our household and this may not have happened without the simple and free coaching provided by John Jacobs and Yorkshire Television. The queues led to more courses, which allowed golf to thrive and boom. This golf boom was the work of many people, and Arnold Palmer and John Jacobs were very much in the team.

It is fifteen years since the formation of OGRO (The Organisation of Golf and Range Operators). We looked at the history of golf ranges and the way that golf centres had developed and it was quite obvious that there was only one man who could possibly be our President - John Jacobs. At the time, John was in his late seventies and despite having a full diary of commitments, he agreed to our request and lent much kudos to our developing organisation.

He attended most of our events and was a star turn at GolfBIC every year until 2014. His ninetieth birthday was celebrated elsewhere, but the assembled delegates sang for him on the 14th March 2015, which brought him to tears as I played him the recording back on the phone. He loved being involved, talking golf and sharing his experiences. He was a great raconteur and the twinkle in his eye never dimmed. He had a wicked sense of humour, most of which it is best not to share in print.

John was also a celebrated author of the very best golf books - Practical Golf will last for hundreds of years as a teachers key reading material. He was also involved in golf course design and helped to create some of the best courses of the modern era. The Edinburgh course at Wentworth, Hoebridge in Wokingham and more recently Remedy Oak in Dorset, were amongst many courses he worked on. In the USA, John was hugely popular and with a colleague set up John Jacobs Golf Schools. These upmarket residential golf schools were

very popular and John was in his element teaching hundreds of keen players at great facilities. It is a real shame that the business did not work out in the long run, as John had put so much into getting it started. Jacobs also designed anti-slice clubs for Dunlop, which were very popular for a while and helped many a slice moderate their carve!

John Jacobs was a realist and one who knew his value to certain projects. He was also stubborn as a mule with regard to the way golf should be taught. As a golf administrator he was a strong negotiator and would not sell his colleagues short by agreeing to a lesser deal than he thought was achievable. But John was a man who never charged a golf professional for a lesson, always gave his advice freely and willingly and always acknowledged the excellent work of other teachers.

John was a fabulous friend to all of us at OGRO, Rohan, Marion and myself will sorely miss him, as I know will countless others. He was a world leader in golf and a world class man, one I am proud to have known as a friend.

A memorial service was held at Winchester Cathedral.

Colin Jenkins PGA  
OGRO Chairman | Golf Features Editor

John Jacobs OBE, OGRO Honorary President presents Butch Harmon with the OGRO Lifetime Achievement Award at the PGA Cocktail Reception on the eve of the Open Championship at Muirfield 2013.



John Jacobs OBE presents Butch Harmon with the OGRO Lifetime Achievement Award 2013 at the PGA Cocktail Party prior to the Open Championship

([http://ogro.org/OGRO\\_LTAAW\\_2013.html](http://ogro.org/OGRO_LTAAW_2013.html))

Click on the image to watch the video.

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It was a full house at Winchester Cathedral on 22nd May as the golf world gathered to celebrate the the life of John Jacobs OBE



*The Memorial Service at Winchester Cathedral*

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John was a huge supporter of OGRO as our Honorary President - here enjoying a laugh with Colin Jenkins during a presentation at the GolfBIC Conference 2012



*John Jacobs with Colin Jenkins at GolfBIC*

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