



## **NIMAGA NOTES**

### **SPECIAL EDITION – NIMAGA HISTORY**

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Over the last few years, several members have asked me about the history of NIMAGA. I thought that documenting the roots of this organization would be beneficial to all. So with the help of Roger Scott, Pete Vercillo and some digging on the internet – I came up with the following narrative about our roots.

The Northern Illinois Men's Amateur Golf Association (NIMAGA) is a not-for-profit organization that came into being during the winter of 1959/1960. The core founding group consisted on eleven local golfers who had two primary goals in mind.

- provide a golf organization to provide area public golfers with a way to participate in tournaments. In 1960, the Chicago District Golf Association (CDGA) was the only golf association existence. The CDGA was a group funded and staffed by private golfers through private clubs and the NIMAGA founders wanted to provide an alternative choice.
- raise funds to send a group of six accomplished public amateur golfers from the Chicagoland area to the 1960 USGA National Publinks golf tournament being held as Ali Wai Golf Course in Honolulu, Hawaii.

The original board of directors in 1960 were:

President:	Ace Ellis
Vice President:	Pat O'Grady & Julio Campagni
Secretary:	Marty Mendelsohn
Treasurer:	Andy Anderson
Handicap Chr:	Al Reitz, Sr.
Tournament Directors:	Marty Skaritka & Vern Landry

Three Chicago Sportswriters also agreed to serve as advisors. They were Tommy Kouzmanoff (Chicago Today), Tommy Tomashek (Chicago American) and Larry Dennis (Chicago Tribune).

In the spring of 1960, the board of directors scheduled the first stroke play event at Evergreen Golf Course at 95<sup>th</sup> & Western in Evergreen Park, Il. With the help of the sportswriter advisors, word spread and the NIMAGA idea was being accepted by the Chicago golfing community. The first tournament drew approximately 40 players and NIMAGA was off and running. By the time of the fourth tournament in July 1960, NIMAGA had raised \$3000.00 and the six area golfers were on their way to Hawaii.

However, the early days were not without problems. Issues with obtaining course sites, prize funding and agreeing on a handicapping system for the members were the main challenges at the time. But despite those obstacles, the first-year membership grew to about 200 golfers.

One of our oldest active members, Pete Vercillo recalls that the year that he joined (1966) was the last year that all tournaments were held on the same course with 5 divisions participating. NIMAGA would take up the morning tee times from 6:00 am until after 1:00 pm. The 5 divisions ranged from a Championship flight (0-3 hdcp with about 60 golfers) including A, B, C & D flights with about 25 golfers each. Some of the early courses that Pete remembers playing were Cog Hill #4 and Big Run. As a matter of fact, Cog Hill #4 was brand new with a greens fee of \$6.00! The membership swelled to over 300 in the mid-1960s.

Early NIMAGA tournament lore is highlighted by the Eskimo Open. This event was played on the first Sunday of January. One of the earliest Eskimo Opens that was played in 1963 and had 16 golfers who completed in -6 degree temperatures. All finished that event – who says golfers are not tough? This event eventually grew in popularity, peaking in 1987 when 3 courses had to be used with a 2 hour wait on tee times.

As NIMAGA grew, it became one of the earliest promoters of junior golf in the nation. In 1967, NIMAGA Juniors was formed which grew to over 600 boy members ranging from the ages of 12 through 18. Several of those junior members went on to bigger things in golf, namely David Ogrin, Rich Dalpos, Roy Biancalanna, Gary Halberg, Gary Pinns and Jay Haas.

A few years after, the name was changed to the Illinois Junior Golf Association (IJGA). As many know, the IJGA still exists today but it owes its' existence to NIMAGA.

Two more 'spin-offs' from NIMAGA were the Northern Amateur and the Illinois State Match Play tournaments. The Northern Amateur was held at Sand Creek in Chesterton, Indiana. This was an annual tournament that drew some of the leading amateur golfers from around the country. Past winners of the Northern Amateur included Howard Twitty, Rich Dalpos and David Ogrin. David's father was one on the eleven founding members of NIMAGA. The Illinois State Match Play was a qualifying tournament with participants from the Northern Amateur and other qualifying locations

Our un-official (official) group historian Roger Scott joined NIMAGA in 1973 and took a very active role in the organization. Roger became a director who eventually ascended to the role of President and now holds an honorary board member status.

Roger was a key figure in supporting, promoting and growing the organization from the mid-1970s and on. During that period, our membership grew to its largest numbers, over 400 players. The board members at that time were instrumental in shaping NIMAGA into the organization much like it exists today.

In the 1980s, the tournament schedule was held during the months of April to October. Among the events that were added during the 1980s were the 2-Man Best Ball, the 2 Day Championship, the Senior Open, and a friendly competition against a group of Wisconsin golfers known as the Milwaukee Challenge. The season ending event was a Tournament of Winners (much like the NIMAGA Players Championship).

Quite a few of our existing members have been involved with NIMAGA for a long time (and I am limiting the list to pre-1980). Among those are Pete Vercillo (1966), Roger Scott (1973), Mark Masciola (1974), Ken Larsen (1975), Dan Dorr (1976), Dan Plens (1976), Steve Lieber (1977), John Lemm (1979).

There have been many hundreds of current and former members that deserve credit for all of the contributions that they have made to this organization that I have not identified in this article, but we owe them a tip of the golf hat.

As you can see, this is a great organization with a rich history. So, when you have finished filling out your scorecard at your next NIMAGA event, take a moment to talk to and thank our earliest members for a job well done.

Remember, it is everyone's duty to do what they can to support and grow this organization. Tell your non-NIMAGA playing partners just what they are missing.