



Meadowood's Amateur Treasure

Walker Team Captain, Nathan Smith,
Accepts Honorary Life Membership from
Meadowood Golf and Tennis Club

By: Sam Kucey, President, MGTC

In 2024, I attended my first Master's program with a friend from Ottawa who had won the ticket lottery. Our purpose was twofold:

1. To walk with and watch our Canadian 2003 Masters Champion, Mike Weir, try to defend his title.
2. To be there when Arnold Palmer, - three-time Masters Champion, played his 50th and last competitive year at Augusta.

Mike Weir missed out on an opportunity to repeat his victory on day two by a stroke. Near the same time, on Friday, Arnold's career was cheered to the end by a revering crowd. For these final rounds, his playing partner was, by Palmer's request, a young amateur from Pittsburgh (and his handsome caddie/father) who narrowly missed the cut on the last day. Unknown to me at the time, I had just watched a future Meadowood member and his talented son caddie and play in their first of four Masters.

That young Amateur was Nathan Smith, and a few short years later, his mom and dad, Vicki and Larry Smith, would venture to Meadowood from their Pittsburgh area home and become winter fixtures at Meadowood. Both accomplished golfers and the friendliest open members MGTC could have hoped for, their son would often spend time working on his game at Meadowood in the years that followed. News of his prowess soon got around (aided and abetted by his extraordinary ball striking talent so evident on the practice tee) and young Nathan began to continue to pile up amateur honors. As open and friendly as his parents, he frequently struck up conversations with members, and it became apparent he felt at home at MGTC.

I recently caught up with Nathan. Fortunately, I did my homework on his remarkable achievements ahead of time. A humble man, he was not going to list or lean into his accomplishments, but they are both fantastic and impressive. What he has been able to do while still a young man in his 40s is remarkable. His resume has led to him being awarded the distinct honor of being the youngest Walker Cup captain in the past 50 years. He is further honored by being named Captain of both the U.S. Cypress Point (September 2025) and the GBI 2026 Lahinch matches.

His earliest memories as a youngster included playing every sport possible. His parents were, and remain, competent golfers, and he loved to go out on the course with them as a 5- to 6-year-old and see if he could outrun the golf cart. It was natural to start swinging a club, and he recalls that his first competitive instincts were sparked by signing up for local junior tournaments through posters sponsored by the local King restaurant chain. By the age of 9 or 10, he had already become a veteran of these junior tournaments.

The results of his early junior efforts were recognized, and Nathan was able to attend Allegheny College as a member of the NCAA Division III golf team. Nathan proceeded to knock it out of the park for the Gators both athletically and academically. Just listing his achievements in his years there is exhausting! He was an outstanding Student Athlete in every way possible. A few of his accomplishments:

- Two-time All-American Academic and National runner-up in 2001 for that Nationwide #1 honor
- Four- time NCAA All-American athlete
- Awarded a coveted NCAA Postgraduate Scholarship
- Led the Gators to three league titles while winning medalist honors three times in the North Coast Athletic Conference
- The Gator Team, under his leadership, delivered top-ten NCAA championship finishes in each of Nathan's four years, including a 3rd-place finish in 1998
- Awarded a position in the Allegheny Hall of Fame as a 2001 graduate in 2010, at the age of 31

Following his graduation, Nathan pursued a career in business while continuing to hone his golf skills. Being young and being very adept at playing the game most of us struggle with, Nathan began an even more impressive string of successes.

One of Nathan's most significant successes was marrying his childhood sweetheart, Dr. Nicole Bianco, in 2005. To add to that momentous year, he also earned his MBA degree from Clarion. All of this happened within the two years following his first Mid-Am win and his appearance at the Masters. Nicole, a PhD graduate, was pursuing her postdoctoral studies as she headed towards becoming a leader in the Medical science technology field. She has been at Nathan's side since, rising impressively within her field and being credited by Nathan for much of the support he has required to move forward with his business and golf careers. Over the early part of the new millennium, Nathan went on a virtual rampage in competitive amateur golf. This feat has not been matched since, as he won his first Mid Amateur title at the age of 25 in 2003, becoming the youngest ever champion. His four total Mid-Am wins still stand alone as an unmatched achievement, surpassing the three wins of fellow Pennsylvanian legend Jay Sigel.

Early Amateur Achievements

In a short dozen years, Nathan achieved the following:

- A record four Mid-Amateur wins in 2003, 2009, 2010, and 2012
- The Pennsylvania Amateur was won twice, in 2002 and 2009
- The West Penn Amateur four times consecutively from 2007 to 2010
- The R.Jay Siegel Match Play three times in 2010, 2013, and 2015
- The inaugural US Amateur Four Ball in 2015 with Todd White
- Nathan had the honor of playing in the Masters four times and the US Open as an Amateur



Nathan Smith with his father and caddie Larry after winning the 2003 U.S. Mid-Amateur Championship.

Photo: Steven Gibbons, Copyright USGA

In accounting for his remarkable success, Nathan has also consistently praised the contributions of his Dad Larry, who has been on his bag for most competitions. He told Mike Dudurich in 2011, "I have the best Caddie who has ever caddied in Pennsylvania. "

What we mere mortals tend to forget is that the amateurs usually play 36 holes a day, and Nathan has played close to 50 holes in some of the closer matches. Dad, Larry, in his 60s at the time, stayed right by his side.

Larry had some dreams realized as well, and Nathan has recounted how, at the first Masters, Larry artfully managed to place his bag down on the practice tee beside one Tiger Woods, stating, "You didn't think I was coming here without getting a close look at Tiger." Nathan admits the nerves of the moment led him to try and overhit a little to impress the acknowledged best of the best, but his dad's bold move, going where others may not have, led to some great memories.

Nathan's first Masters experience in 2004 was revisited in a July 2024 article by Zac Weiss in Pittsburgh Golf News. Nathan played a practice round with Arnold Palmer and Masters boss Fred Ridley— an honor he didn't think could be equaled until a day later when he saw the main draw. He and Masters qualifier Bob Estes were to share in one of golf's most poignant moments-Arnold's last Masters competition. Two days playing with his childhood hero and fellow Pennsylvanian, both he and Estes reminisced on what it meant to them.

Nathan spoke of how kind and caring Arnold was to him during those days at Augusta, as well as of the emotions Arnold controlled as he basked in the memories and adulation of “Arnie's Army” of 50 years of competition at Augusta. Arnold was to live 12 more years, passing in 2016, and they met and spoke as friends after that week. Arnold's human side was demonstrated by the single gesture he made a few weeks later when Nathan was in the hospital recovering from his shoulder surgery. The phone rang by his hospital bed, and it was Arnold with some kind words, a call from a friend! Bob Estes considers that week to this day a highlight of his career.



Phil Mickelson won the first of his Masters -his first major -that week at age 33. Nathan's four visits to Augusta for the Masters draw did result in some crystal - he has a beautiful piece (instead, his dad, Larry, keeps it safe on his mantle at home!). Nathan was closest to the hole on a par 3, and he described it like this when I asked him if he played in the Par 3 Masters on Wednesdays, which looks like a lot of fun. "I have a nice piece of crystal because I was closest to the hole. I boned the shot -almost a miss-and it ran low and somehow ended up 6 inches from the pin. Phil Mickelson was his playing partner, and he winked and said for everyone to hear, "Great knockdown shot, Nathan."

The Walker Cup

The Holy Grail for an Amateur golfer in America is to make the National Team. In golf, this translates to being chosen for the Walker Cup Team. The brainchild of USGA President George Herbert Walker (grandfather and great-grandfather to two future US presidents of the Bush name), the inaugural matches were held at The National Golf Links. The competition format, from inception, has been 10-man teams, with a non-playing captain since the 1940s. This is one of the USGA and the R&A's most prestigious international events, and all aspects of the team assembly and event are under their auspices. The purpose was to foster international goodwill, camaraderie, and relationships using the spirit, integrity, and purity of the amateur game of golf. The opponents have always been Great Britain and Ireland/Northern Ireland. Walker, a respected international banker and an avid golfer, is a believer in golf as a bridge between Nations. Golf was on the rise after World War I, and the pinnacle of achievement was to make this team. Held biennially since 1922, it served as the inspiration for the professional equivalent -The Ryder Cup -introduced by British businessman Samuel Ryder in 1927 (the Ryder Cup changed to include all of Europe in 1979).

Players with resumes of Nathan's stature made the radar of the USGA and its selection committee. Following his success in his NCAA career, including his Mid Amateur title in 2003 and multiple amateur titles, Nathan was selected for the Walker Cup team. He received the call for the 2009 Team and played a significant role in the US winning the Cup at Merion in September. On a tear, a short month later, Nathan went to Kiawah at the Cassique course and won his second MidAm in October 2009.

Not finished yet, Nathan was selected to the Walker Cup Team again in 2011, traveling to Aberdeen, where the GBI team wrestled the trophy back. This US loss served to set up one of the most satisfying moments in Nathan's career two years later. Returning to the team in 2013, it was not only the battle of Nations but of Nathans! In the deciding match, Nathan Smith defeated GBI's Nathan Kimsey 4&3 to put up the decisive 14th point and bring the Walker Cup back to the USA. Fittingly, what was to be Nathan's last Walker Cup playing experience was held at the National Links, where the very first Walker Cup was held in 1922.



It is eye-opening to examine the company Nathan has put himself in through his amateur career. Walker Cup team members who played on multiple teams throughout the years include Bobby Jones, William Fownes, Frances Ouimet, Jay Sigel, Charles Coe, Billy Joe Patton, Jess Sweetser, Bob Lewis, and Dick Siderowf. Only nine players have played in more than Nathan Smith's three tournaments. Countless others have had the honor of a Walker Cup in their careers, including Jack Nicklaus, Tiger Woods, Rory McIlroy, Ricky Fowler, Dustin Johnson, Scotty Scheffler, Billy Horschel, Sandy Lyle, LukeDonald, and Matt Fitzpatrick. Illustrious company indeed!

Nathan's dedication to amateur golf, coupled with shoulder surgery at a critical time in his development, pushed him towards a life of balancing a successful business career with a burning passion for amateur golf, aided by a talent for Match play and golf endurance.

Getting There

Nathan credits everyone but himself for the success in his career- he is a humble athlete. That character attribute almost always accompanies greatness. The patience and support of his wife, parents, and business associates at USI are frequently mentioned by Nathan as the support team that has made his career possible. But how does one succeed in these seeming excesses that Nathan has accomplished? I asked him what habits transfer positively from Golf to Work success.



After pondering the secrets of success in golf and work, he said, "You have to do the work, put the time in. Whether it's hitting balls or making sales calls, success is dependent on repeating the effort over and over. Expecting to have your best game or results at work without consistently putting in effort is bound to leave you short. Learning this in golf and embracing this repetitive work is what has helped me and will help anyone be successful at their job."

In a 2011 interview, Nathan gave another insight into success: loving what you do. He admits to being obsessed with both his work and his "hobby"-golf. Neither gets tired for him, and he can't wait to get to work, the range, or the course after work.

The difference between an amateur golfer and a professional is that you are balancing two careers, and this is what has made Nathan's journey even more remarkable. His advice is reminiscent of Ben Hogan's advice to golfers: "dig your swing out of the dirt."



Meadowood in the Picture

One of the difficulties for someone with a home base in Pittsburgh with a 5-star golf career is the weather. Keeping sharp in the winter meant many days where Nathan would clean off the mats at his course at Wildwood or the local Pine Creek range, hitting balls out into the snow. His best man and fellow outstanding Pennsylvania

Amateur, Sean Knapp, himself a legend in Amateur Golf, marvels at Nathan's ability to get the job done no matter what the conditions. He states, "It's probably not just a couple of dozen but a couple of thousand he hits into the snow." In a 2010 Sports Illustrated article on Nathan, Knapp stated, "Nathan is spectacularly unspectacular. I'd put his short game up against almost anybody's. It's Tour Quality-same for his putting. Nathan does not miss a putt he needs to make. He's a killer on the course. All great players are."

Meadowood Board member and multiple club champion Charlie Schramm, who has played MGTC with Nathan (as well as followed him at the Masters and Bay Hill), seconded Sean Knapp's assessment of Nathan's abilities.

Keeping sharp in the winter months and preparing for the competitive season meant, back in the early 2000s, taking the odd weekend trip to Myrtle Beach, where his parents used to winter, and in the past dozen years, heading down to Meadowood Golf Club in the Fort Pierce/Vero Beach area of Florida. Dad Larry and Mom Vicki are winter members at Meadowood Golf and Tennis Club, and Nathan loves coming down whenever possible to visit and practice, grabbing a weekend here and there. He loves the new short game practice area and new greens and has always been able to get his reps in on the MGTC range. Members always know when Nathan is on the range-his swing stands out, to say the least. Nathan told me, "I love Meadowood. The members are great, and being able to get down has helped me build the resume I needed to become the Walker Cup captain."

Nathan has been able to play the course with his dad and other members, praising the recent condition of the course, including the firm greens. (MGTC undertook a significant greens, bunker, and practice area renovation in 2024-5.)

Nathan was able to recall every hole and, in a brief reminiscence, commented on Meadowood's ability to provide a fair game for golfers of all abilities. He was taken with Ankrom's design, which presented many risk-reward holes to keep the game interesting, sprinkling in play-it-straight-up holes with memorable shot choices on others. He loved the par 3s from the back tees—especially holes 4 and 15. Classics. Hole 16—perhaps Meadowood's signature hole, a par five that is perfectly laid out with risk-reward options — was a hole he spoke of fondly. Starting with hole #1, a par 5, which was also a test for the imaginative, was among his favorites, as was the picturesque finishing hole #18 and the island tee on #17.

Members are aware of our hidden gem at Meadowood, but to have a world-class golfer of Nathan's status comment on it was truly special. This accomplished international golfer has played them all and has an eye and a game for the world's best courses.

Which brings us back to Cypress Point in 2025 and Lahinch in 2026.

Walker Cup Captain

Nathan acknowledged that MGTC played a part in building his resume, which ultimately led to the call in 2022 from the USGA, naming him Captain of the Walker Cup Team at its 50th anniversary event at Cypress Point in 2025. He had been on their radar for a few years as his achievements were unparalleled. When the USGA first asked his thoughts on when he would like to captain, he was straightforward in stating the sooner the better. He believed that a captain who still played and could identify with the younger players, and compete in events they were in, was strong for team building. Consequently, the USGA stepped away from the usual age group and named Nathan the Captain at 46 years of age, the youngest in decades.

Once he accepted, the real work began. The rotation was changing back to even years, and Nathan was asked to captain at Cypress Point as well as the return match at Lahinch in Ireland in 2026. The USGA Committees and records in USGA events play a significant role in final selections, but the Captain plays an increasing role. There are no shortages of talented options, with numerous great young NCAA players and a mix of seasoned Mid-Am players, which has often proven useful. When I asked Nathan about the process and decisions he has to make, he said the most challenging part is not picking, but having to make the call to players who don't make it.

Nathan recounted his life since the captaincy descended upon him in an interview with USGA's David Shefter last month (May 28, 2025). His work has involved time with previous captains and included shadowing 2023 captain Mike McCoy at St. Andrew's for the US win.

There is so much planning involved -reading the interview is enlightening. From on-course strategy to team building to fitness, the amount of prep work is significant. Nathan's relatively recent history as a player will be beneficial, but he also acknowledges that understanding the stress and nerves involved in the role will be helpful. In a way, he knows the captaincy will have “gut-wrenching ”moments to watch, but is humble enough to know the real pressure is on the one with the club in their hand.

Nathan's knowledge and awareness of golf history are front and center. Blessed with the opportunity to get to know the one man most responsible for making golf the publicly accessible game it is, Arnold Palmer has absorbed both the professional and amateur history of the game.

In speaking of the preeminence of Cypress Point, he pointed out its place in the pantheon of golf courses and, impressively, the significant role recent Hall of Fame member Marion Hollis played in its creation, as well as how that strong female history has carried over there.

Never having had the privilege of hitting balls with Sam Snead during his 14 years at Meadowood (Sam passed away in 2002), he was very aware of Sam's strong history with MGTC and the work he put in daily on our range. Nathan has played in over 50 USGA events and has served, and continues to serve, on State and National committees. He continues to give back to the game.

The game is built on the shoulders of those amateur golfers and later professional golfers who serve as the sirens of the game for us mere mortals. Nathan Smith is taking his place as a role model for the game of golf.

Our Newest MGTC Member

Meadowood is proud that Nathan Smith has accepted his Honorary Life Membership at MGTC. He was generous with his memories and offered positive comments about our members and the club. All of Meadowood will be watching this September 6-7 as the US takes on GBI, looking for a 5th straight win on the 50th anniversary of the Walker Cup. Watching closely will be Larry and Vicki Smith, proud parents, and rightfully so. When asked if they would be there, Nathan wryly replied, 'They may already be out there setting up!'

Nathan will be down this coming season for a formal induction, and we look forward to seeing him at MGTC.

