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'Sam Snead is your winter pro.' — From the 1959 brochure

The Legend of "Slammin' Sammy" Snead Royal Palm's First Golf Pro

Back in the late 50s and 60s, as prospective buyers from around the country were learning about the luxurious yet-to-be-built Royal Palm Yacht & Country Club, there was one face that stood out on almost every piece of promotional material.

That was the face of "Slammin' Sammy" - golf legend Sam Snead - who, in a stroke of marketing genius, became the growing community's first golf pro.

For the first five years, Snead was the face of the "the most desirable residential address in Florida."

"There's no doubt that he played an important role in the development of Royal Palm Yacht & Country Club," says David Roberts of Royal Palm Properties, who met with Snead several times in the last decade. "Many of the prospects who came down to look at Royal Palm had a chance to play a round with him."

One of the leading golfers of his time - and perhaps one of the greatest golfers of all time - Snead had come to the Boca Raton Hotel in 1957 to take the reins from Tommy Armour, the resort's first director of golf.

With his signature straw hat and his folksy southern manner, Snead was natural charmer of hotel guests who would often pay up to \$100 - a princely sum back then - for a lesson from the man who had won dozens of PGA tour events.

In fact even during those years when he was spending his winters in Florida, Snead could be found on a PGA tour in the summer, ringing up victory after victory with a swing often described as a work of art.

It was no wonder then, that as Arthur Vining Davis and the team at Arvida began developing Royal Palm Yacht & Country Club, on what had been the polo fields next to the hotel they then owned, they turned to Snead for help. As a lure to get affluent buyers from cold climates in Wisconsin or Michigan to come look at Royal Palm for their winter home, Arvida's sales team would throw in a round of golf with Sammy.

"About seven or eight years ago I called him and told him I live in a community in Florida where he was a the golf pro," Roberts said. He said "Royal Palm, right?"

"He was the top golfer of the day and Arvida recognized his value," says Roberts, who has lived in Royal Palm since 1984. "Being able to play a round with Sam Snead was a great draw."

For Roberts, being able to play a round or two with Snead was an experience he is unlikely to forget. And one that no doubt improved his golf game.

Roberts arranged to visit Snead at The Greenbriar country club in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, where the winner of three green Master jackets had served as head pro and spent most of his summers.

"Sam Snead took me golfing and it was unbelievable. He was just joking around and gave me few tips on my swing. He has a great swing."

Roberts returned to Greenbriar a few years ago, shortly before Snead dies at age 89. Even then, the golf legend graciously agreed to pose with Roberts' young son, Nicholas, and give him a few pointers.



Sam Snead, David and Nicholas Roberts

Like many of those who played with Snead while he was the pro at Royal Palm, Roberts was taken by Snead's great homespun humor nourished by Snead's upbringing in the backwoods of western Virginia during the depression.

While many of his later competitors on tour sported aristocratic upbringings, Snead was from a family so poor that he learned to play golf barefooted and with clubs made from tree limbs.

Yet, Snead was a man of so much raw talent that he easily fit in with the other golfers on the PGA tour. An outstanding athlete in high school, Snead turned to golf after injuring his hand playing football. His strength became his trademark as he became known as a long-ball hitter in a time when the emphasis was on finesse.

It's estimated that Sam Snead won about 160 tournaments in a career that spanned six decades and began in 1936 when he played in his first tournament, the Hershey Open. Of those, 81, were events on PGA Tour, which he helped get rolling. He was also an integral part of the inaugural season of the PGA Senior Tour.

He closed out his touring career in 1982, winning a Legends of Golf tournament with his partner Don January but continued to play, lacing his rounds with jokes and wild stories.

Snead's career was marked by amazing victories and some stunning defeats.

After returning home from World War II, Snead earned a victory in the 1946 British Open and collected a check for \$600. He would later say that the trip over ended up costing him \$1,400 more than he won.

Three years later, he won his first Masters title and claimed the green jacket again in 1952 and 1954.

Snead was also the oldest player to win on the PGA tour, winning the 1965 Greater Greensboro Open at age 52. He remained a force to be reckoned with even into his 60s, finishing third in the 1974 PGA Championship, a tournament he had won three times. At 67, he became the youngest player to shoot his age and followed that year later by shooting an incredible 66.

Snead never won a U.S. Open, but came close in 1947 when he lost in a playoff after missing a 30-inch putt.

But it is the victories that Snead, who died in 2002, is remembered for by people around the world. And it is his kindness and personality that he is remembered for by the handful of people still in the area who played with Snead on the Robert Trent Jones course at Royal Palm.

For his part, Roberts hopes to make Snead's involvement in Royal Palm a part of the community's history with perhaps a plaque or collection of memorabilia.

For more information about Royal Palm Yacht & Country Club, contact David W. Roberts, Broker/Owner of Royal Palm Properties, the only real estate firm specializing exclusively in Royal Palm at 561.368.6200 or visit www.royalpalm.com

