

Fought, Black Butte Resort win golf awards

By Steve Kadel
Correspondent

Jeff Fought developed an affection for golf early in life during outings with relatives, including his grandmother.

“It brought our family together,” he said. “Those were special times, and we had real-life conversations going down the fairway. Golf was such a social element.”

He enjoyed early success, winning the Oregon state junior title and placing second in the Oregon state amateur tournament. But his goal of joining the PGA tour never quite came true, despite his efforts on qualifying tours in California, Arizona, and Texas.

That didn’t faze Fought, who redirected his sights toward a club pro job, working his way up the ranks of Oregon golf clubs to his current position as director of golf at Black Butte Ranch.

Fought and the Ranch both were honored October 24, when the Oregon Golf Association (OGA) named him Club Executive of the Year. Black Butte Ranch is Member Club of the Year.

“I’m really proud about it,” he said. “I didn’t lobby for it.”

The awards were made during OGA’s annual meeting, held at the Portland Golf Club. A press release from Black Butte Ranch explains the individual and club honors stemmed from the way Black Butte Ranch handled the Oregon Amateur Championship, held last summer on its Glaze Meadow Golf Course.

“Their club provided first-class support when it came to helping with this year’s championship,” the OGA announced. “Most of the volunteers that week were residents from Black Butte—and many of the spectators

were as well. The members from Black Butte Ranch were essential in making the championship run smoothly.”

The OGA said in a news release that Fought was chosen for “exceptional leadership” with an OGA member club.

Fought said many people, including the resort’s golf staff and maintenance staff, contributed to the effort.

“We did a spectacular job, but we couldn’t have done it without the staff,” he said.

Fought added that donating the course to OGA for a full week was a way for Black Butte Ranch to give back to the game of golf.

Despite the recent success, he acknowledged these are not the best of times for the golf industry. More courses are closing than are opening, although Fought said there was a push to build new courses nationwide during the early 1990s. However, he noted that the “build it and they will come” philosophy did not catch hold as industry officials hoped.

Adding to the situation, golf equipment sales are down and fewer people have watched golf on television since Tiger Woods left the game due to injuries.

“Our core golfer used to play three or four rounds a week,” Fought said, “but that’s down to one round a week now.”

He declined to reveal the specific numbers of rounds played at Glaze Meadow and the Ranch’s original course, Big Meadow Golf Course, during recent years, although he said the trend is positive, with more rounds played this year than in 2015.

Black Butte Ranch property owners and their guests make up a large part of the resort’s clientele. Other players come from Eugene, Salem, and Portland.

Strategies have been enacted at the resort to increase the number of children taking up the game. That includes installing “family tees” that make each hole shorter and more accessible to younger and less skilled players.

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Fought, a Brigham Young University graduate, said children also are invited to a weekly putting challenge at Glaze Meadow. Resort representatives also have visited Sisters public schools to introduce students to the game in physical education classes through a program called SNAG golf—which stands for Starting New at Golf.

Fought believes part of participation problem stems from the attitudes of millennials, those generally born from the mid 1990s to early 2000s. They are used to playing electronic games that give almost instant gratification, he said, while 18 holes of golf takes about four hours to complete.



PHOTO BY STEVE KADEL

Black Butte Ranch Director of Golf Jeff Fought and BBR itself recently received awards from the Oregon Golf Association.

“Fewer millennials are taking up the game,” Fought said. “Golf may be too slow for them.”

He never felt that way about the sport, though. Fought relished each minute on the course as a young man, whether competing in a tournament or just playing for fun. When his PGA hopes dimmed, he got married, had a child, and began a series of club pro jobs.

He began as assistant pro at Willamette Valley in Portland, and went on to Riverside and Waverly country clubs, also of Portland. A big role presented itself when he helped organize the Fred Meyer Challenge, a three-day charity tournament in Oregon made famous by former PGA star and TV golf commentator Peter Jacobsen. In recent

years, he qualified three times to play in the national Senior Club Professional Championships for those age 50 and over.

Still, Fought looks back on his early days in the sport with particular fondness. He didn’t hesitate when asked what trait is most valuable for a golf director.

“I think you need to love golf,” he said. “That’s the main thing.”

Scott Huntsman, Black Butte Ranch president, called the two OGA awards “quite an honor.”

“They are indicative of a commitment to excellence and passion for the game from our golf staff, and a spirit of community and volunteerism from owners and golfers at Black Butte Ranch,” he said in a news release.

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