

## **Brief History and Fun Facts of “The Cobb”**

The Irvin Cobb Golf Championships (The Cobb) started out in 1937 as the “Tri-State Amateur Golf Championship” at the old 9-hole Paducah Municipal Golf Course (which is now known as Rolling Hills Country Club), and was strictly for amateurs. The first field had 32 players from 5 states. The original reason for the establishment of The Cobb “was to further the game of golf in this area”. The 1938 Champion’s trophy is on display in the Pro Shop (it was donated by O.H. Shelton, Jr’s family).

The “Tri-State” tournament moved to what is now known as Paxton Park after the new municipal course opened on July 18, 1940 (Paxton Park was the 1<sup>st</sup> 18 hole golf course in Kentucky west of Louisville). The new course was the result of an effort by the Paducah Junior Chamber of Commerce and Mr. Edwin J. Paxton to “bring golf to the working men and women of Paducah”. The course was built by Franklin D Roosevelt’s depression era program called the WPA (Works Projects Administration). The purpose of the WPA was to build public use facilities by putting unemployed labor to work. The new course was designed by George Davies, a designer from the British Isles.

In 1940, a professional division was added to accommodate a few pros who wanted to play in the well known Paducah event. The first professional field was 9 players.

In 1941, the “Tri-State” became “The Cobb” after being named after Paducahan Irvin S. Cobb, a famous writer and actor of the time who always claimed to be from Paducah, even when he moved to New York.

In 1953, The Cobb was known as the largest golf tournament in the South (having had as many as 319 players in the field) at one time, with approximately 250 players regularly participating. During the mid-fifties, the gallery would vary between 2,000-3,000 spectators. The Cobb was described by one player in the 60s as being more of “an institution than a golf tournament”.

A note of history: Cliff Harrington, a black professional who grew up caddying at Pinehurst CC, and who Lee Elder described as “one of the most promising golfers I ever saw, of any race”, won the Cobb twice in 1961 and 1964. Mr. Harrington finished in the Cobb top 10 professionals in 1960, before any black professionals were playing on the PGA Tour (or were allowed to play in many professional tournaments). Mr. Harrington died in combat in Vietnam in 1965. The Cobb was ahead of its time, and correct in being on the right side of history and honoring a man who chose to serve his country ...rather than opting out to compete professionally (which he could have done). We salute Mr. Harrington.

The Cobb has long been a well known event, with an impressive list of highly skilled players throughout its history, including countless various state amateur and state Open champions and collegiate players. Players that have competed in the Cobb include Bob Hamilton, Cary Middlecoff, Bob Goalby, Gay Brewer, Hillman Robbins, Jack Ryan, Pete Doll, Frank Beard,

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Herman Coelho, Ted Hale, Chick Yarbrough, Al Atkins, Bob Stone, Jay Haas, Ralph Landrum, Jerry Haas, Grant Sturgeon, Russ Cochran, Kenny Perry, Jimmy Brown, Tom Wargo, Jeff Cook, John Riegger, Brad Fabel, Danny Green, Rob Long, Aaron Ingalls, Jamie Broce, Rick Cochran, Chris Wilson, Jordan Blann, Buddy Bryant, Kent Bulle, Ben Godwin, Trey Shirley, Chris Osborne, Scott Beard, Fred Myers, J.B. Williams, Patrick Newcomb, Emma Talley, Josh Teater, Tim O’Neal, Gibby Gilbert III, Ashton Van Horn, Trey Wall, and so many more (players listed above have all won their respective state amateur championships, their respective state open titles, qualified or won on the PGA, LPGA or PGA Champions Tours—our apologies to anyone we overlooked, but the quantity of quality players that have participated in the Cobb probably means we have missed someone inadvertently).

Cobb alumni have won over 90 PGA Tour events, including the PGA Championship, two US Opens, three Masters, 41 PGA Tour Champions events, including 7 majors, the US Mens Amateur, the US Women’s Amateur, the Men’s and Women’s NCAA Champion, and qualified for 8 Ryder Cup, 6 Presidents Cup, and 2 Walker Cup teams. Those of us who have been stewards of this event over the years are proud of our Cobb players, and their great success, because they continue to inspire a new generation of elite golfers. Golfers who participate in the Cobb are generally skilled players wanting to see how they stack up against the strongest field in this area. They are here to continue to improve by being challenged by a course that can require patience and many different shots. The Cobb is a stepping stone for many players to that next level of competition, as is evidenced by its pedigree.

The expansion of the Cobb to 54 holes, and the qualification for USGA World Amateur Golf Ranking points, will continue to elevate the competition in the Cobb to an even higher level event. We look forward to our newest edition of the Cobb, and most of all, we want our players to enjoy their experience in this event ... and we greatly appreciate their participation and sportsmanship. The sportsmanship and character displayed by the competitors in this event has always been encouraging to witness and a tribute to the quality of the field of players.

On behalf of our community, our volunteers and staff, and our sponsors, we hope you enjoy the 2025 edition of the Irvin Cobb Golf Championships.