

## From Shandon to Ryder Cup

Written by Donald Fullarton - Last Updated Friday, 30 July 2010 17:26

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ONE of the best known and most liked sportsmen to emerge from the Helensburgh area was Ryder Cup golfer Tom Haliburton.

Son of Mr and Mrs Robert Haliburton, he was born Thomas Bruce Haliburton in Ardencaple Cottage, Rhu, and lived there for some years before the family moved to Loudon Cottage, Shandon, where he learned to play and love golf.

He once recalled: "I used to play around Shandon when I was quite young, and my playing took me into the vicinity of Shandon golf course which fascinated me.

"Shandon golf course was a very good course for learning on, and it is a pity that it has disappeared now. I can remember a big petition was drawn up when the course was threatened, but it was not saved.

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“I went to Hermitage School in Helensburgh, and when I was 15 years-old I left school and began to learn the skills of a professional golfer.”

Tom became assistant to the professional at Higgs Castle in Glasgow and was there for four years, then moved on to Prestwick St Nicholas. He was also chief assistant to Henry Cotton in London for some time as well, being attached to Knowle, North Middlesex, Ashbridge and then Wentworth.

He made his competitive mark in 1938 when he won both the West of Scotland and the Northern Open Championships.

When the Second World War broke out he joined the Royal Air Force as a physical training instructor, and when he married in 1941 he had attained the rank of Corporal. After the war ended he went back to his golfing career.

He was a very successful tournament player, winning the Daily Mail Tournament in 1949 and finishing runner-up in the PGA Matchplay Championship in 1957. He also won the Yorkshire Evening News Championship in 1963.

In 1952 he established a world record of 126 strokes for two rounds during the Spalding Tournament at Worthing. He had rounds of 61 and 65 in setting a British tournament record which has never been equalled.

Two years later Tom played for Scotland in the Canada Cup, and also to celebrate 50 years of golf at the Cardross club, he took part in an exhibition match with Dai Rees (South Herts), Fred Daly (Balmoral) and Peter Alliss (Ferndown), setting a new professional course record of 66.

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In 1961 he played in the British Ryder Cup team which lost 14.5-9.5 to the United States at Royal Lytham and St Annes, and two years later he was in the British team which lost 23-9 at East Lake Country Club in Atlanta, Georgia.



In the first match he had the honour of playing the legendary Arnold Palmer in the singles, and lost 2 and 1. In all he played four foursomes and fourballs, but never registered a win.

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He said: "I had a good year for playing in 1963 and won a lot. I thought then that I had had enough and would retire from competitions while I was still at the top."

In 1963 he carded 29 for the inward half at the Open at Royal Lytham, and he remains co-holder of the record for the lowest nine-hole score in the Open.

In 1969 he was captain of the Professional Golfers Association, and in 1973 he was the non-playing captain of the British Club professionals team which played the United States.

He was professional at the exclusive Wentworth club at Virginia Water in Surrey from 1952 until his death in 1975.

The club website says of him: "Tom Haliburton was a professional typical of his generation in that he combined his duties at the club with a long and successful professional tournament career."

He returned to Helensburgh every year when he visited his father who lived in Old Kilpatrick, staying at the Queen's Hotel with his friend Norman Drummond, the manager, whom he first met playing in a schoolboy golf tournament.

His last playing visit was to take part in a major Pro-Am staged at the Helensburgh club in August 1974, which attracted 50 top professionals and 2,000 spectators.

Tom established for the Wentworth club its professional line of succession in 1969 after he met Bernard Gallacher playing in his first Ryder Cup match at Royal Birkdale at Southport. But the circumstances of the handover in 1975 were uniquely tragic.

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Aged 60, he had been thinking of retiring and had recommended Bernard to the club as his successor. Having just started a Saturday practice round with him on the club's east course in February, he collapsed on the first green and died. He was survived by his wife and a married daughter.

He was considered an excellent coach of young players and was always keen to encourage them, and his name is remembered every year when the junior golfers of the Cardross and Helensburgh clubs compete for the coveted Tom Haliburton Trophy.

- *Photos by courtesy of The Herald, Glasgow.*