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**Sports Illustrated**<sup>®</sup>  
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# GO GOLF

MAGAZINE

**GUEST EDITOR**

# JOHNNY MILLER

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# My Nifty 50



COURTESY OF FOUR SEASONS RESORT HUALALAI

When I tapped in on an Arkansas course last year, I'd finally done it: I'd fulfilled a decades-long quest to play in all 50 states. From Maine to Hawaii, here's my No. 1 memory from each one.

By JOE PASSOV

## Alabama (2001)

My maiden round on the **Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail** was pure "wow." Grand National's Lake course, in Opelika, has classic Trent Jones tattered-edge bunkers, huge, elevated greens and water hazards galore. I left convinced that the Jones Trail is the poster boy for superior value. (\$46-\$81; 800-949-4444, [rtjgolf.com](http://rtjgolf.com))

## Alaska (1995)

Strange looks from the airline-counter lady happen when you check clubs to Alaska. Granted, playing my own

sticks was not imperative on the then-primitive fairways of **North Star Golf Club** in Fairbanks—America's northernmost USGA-rated course—where muddy, rutted landing areas and moose sightings were the norm. (\$35-\$50; 907-457-4653, [northstargolf.com](http://northstargolf.com))

## Arizona (1986)

So many highlights from my home state. Still, my first ace tops my list. It came during a Memorial Day game with my dad at **Desert Canyon** (formerly Fountain Hills). I knew I'd pured my 5-iron on the semi-blind 155-yard 4th

(now the 13th), and after a brief search, I peeked into the hole—and felt the greatest emotional rush golf can yield. That day, Fountain Hills was as great as Pine Valley. (\$65-\$90; 480-837-1173, [desertcanyongolf.com](http://desertcanyongolf.com))

## Arkansas (2011)

It took me 40 years to play all 50 states. When I dropped a final putt at the pleasant Park course at **Hot Springs Country Club** last October, with my wife Betsy on the flag, I'd done it! Few Willie Park Jr. design features are left, but it's a nice round of golf, and a great place to make (personal) history. (\$95; 501-624-4981, [hotspringscc.com](http://hotspringscc.com))

## California (1982)

Pebble. Torrey. Pasatiempo. Great courses, all. Yet for years after my first, magical round at **Cypress Point Club**, if I was having trouble sleeping, I'd replay it in my mind, hole by hole. No other

course made me feel so privileged to be a golfer.

## Colorado (1986)

I played a long-ago game with my brother John at **Singletree** (now called **Sonnenalp**), a Jay Morrish/Bob Cupp design set at nearly 8,000 feet. My brother pounded 4-wood, 4-wood to reach the 560-yard opening hole in two, and we were left exhilarated, and a little punchy, by the altitude. Sadly, a May snowstorm sent us packing after 10 entertaining holes. (\$85-\$160; 970-477-5372, [sonnenalpgolfclub.com](http://sonnenalpgolfclub.com))

## Connecticut (1997)

A tip of the cap to graceful old **Woodway Country Club** in Darien, with its 1918 Willie Park Jr. design, for being in the forefront of the burgeoning environmental movement. The enhanced wetlands and purple martin boxes dotting the restored native roughs left a lasting impression on me



Hawaii's Hualalai course.

### Hawaii (2009)

The **Four Seasons Resort Hualalai** on the Big Island is the best golf resort in North America. Talk about service. They not only replace the fresh fruit in your room daily, they ask you which fruits you prefer. Jack Nicklaus's friendliest design seals the deal. My perception may have been influenced by my pro-am pairing in the Champions Tour's Mitsubishi event. When his name was drawn for my group, all I could think was: "I'm playing 18 holes with my idol, Tom Watson!" When I told him I ranked courses for *Golf Magazine*, he replied: "Courses should be played, not ranked." Vintage Watson! He was oh-so-gracious, offering me personalized chipping tips as we walked up 18. As my dad once said, "They pay you to do that?" Sometimes they do, Dad. (\$250; 808-325-8000, [fourseasons.com/hualalai](http://fourseasons.com/hualalai))

that golf and the environment could thrive together.

### Delaware (2012)

My wife and I accompanied my mother-in-law Peggy for a nine-hole jaunt on her 90th birthday at the **Rookery** in Milton. She would have gone another nine, but we had 30 guests, cake,

and ice cream waiting at the house. (\$30-\$70; 302-684-3000, [rookerygolf.com](http://rookerygolf.com))

### Florida (1995)

It was an early March outing at the **Breakers Ocean** course in Palm Beach with my 84-year-old grandfather. We battled wind and rain at the historic

course, which is drenched in charm and lore. I gave Gramps a couple of chances to bag it, but we pressed on, grinning all the way to the 19th hole.

### Georgia (1993)

Yes, I've played Augusta. Once. I arrived 45 minutes early, not to hit balls but to soak up the

ambience. Our caddie knew the greens and guided me to an 84, with one 3-putt. I almost aced the 12th with a 6-iron, but it lipped out—as did my birdie putt. **Augusta National** is the hardest tee time in golf, but I'm not greedy. One and done is fine with me.

### Idaho (1997)

One of my favorite gimmicks in golf is the floating par-3 island green at the **Coeur d'Alene Resort**. I've made par both times I've played there in summer. Even better was a January 1992 attempt when the course and green were closed. To meet a deadline, I was allowed to take driver—yes, driver—and rip balls at the isolated target, moored for the winter at 270 yards out. With my usual warning-track power and the 20-degree temps, I never came close, but it was fun trying. (\$150-\$220; 208-667-4653, [cdaresort.com](http://cdaresort.com))

### Illinois (2009)

The intoxicating auras of history and exclusivity swirl at **Chicago Golf Club**. As my heady day unfolded with one charming C.B. Macdonald/Seth Raynor hole after another, it was like Christmas morning, with 18 presents under the tree, including a "Redan," an "Eden" and a "Blarritz."

### French Lick (Ross) in Indiana.



### Indiana (2008)

I first played **French Lick's** Donald Ross course on a 96-degree scorcher in 1996 and came away warm but wowed by the green contouring. I intended to play the resort's new Pete Dye course on my return, but Dye had it aerated that morning. I settled for a wonderful return round on the Ross, which featured a superb recent restoration by Hoosier State native Lee Schmidt. (\$90-\$120; 888-936-9360, [frenchlick.com](http://frenchlick.com))

FLORIAN MEDIA STRATEGIES

**Iowa (1985)**

I haven't teed it up in the Hawkeye State since Hall & Oates roamed the earth, but I recall 1941 Iowa Open and three-time PGA Tour host **Sioux City Boat Club** as an engaging, member-friendly, tree-lined track with small, quick greens.

**Kansas (1987)**

Until I finally reach Prairie Dunes, I'll go with a pleasant trip around **Arthur B. Sim Park Golf Course**, near downtown Wichita, a busy, ancient muni beloved by locals. (\$13.50-\$34.50; 316-337-9100, [golfwichita.com](http://golfwichita.com))

**Kentucky (2008)**

Camped out in the Bluegrass State for the Ryder Cup at Valhalla, I snuck away to the private **Olde Stone** in Bowling Green, with its dramatic elevation changes on the back nine, golden fescue grasses, fast bentgrass greens, and wrist-fracturing rough.

**Louisiana (2003)**

No course in the country embodies its city's spirit like New Orleans's **Audubon Park**, which is accessible by streetcar. Reconfigured in 2002 by Denis Griffiths, this 114-year-old track is now a 4,220-yard, par-62 that's loaded with character. Lagoons, bunkers, and gnarled live oaks spice up play. Best of all, this feels like a genuine urban park. I played the par-3 15th alongside a sea of Rollerbladers and families with strollers. (\$30-\$40; 504-212-5290, [auduboninstitute.org](http://auduboninstitute.org))

**Maine (2001)**

A morning sail, lobster rolls at lunch, afternoon golf on the Atlantic at **Samoset Resort** (I was smitten with nos. 3, 4, 14) and blueberry pie for dessert. That's a perfect summer day in my book. (\$70-\$140; 207-594-2511, [samosetresort.com](http://samosetresort.com))

**Maryland (2007)**

**Caves Valley** near Baltimore is a gorgeous, tidily groomed Tom Fazio design where they treated me like a member. Who needs a stroke-smoothing belly putter when they bring your cocktail to you on the practice green?

**Massachusetts (1998)**

As a golf history freak, I was overwhelmed with the aura at **The Country Club** in Brookline. I absorbed every detail that playing partner Rees Jones could impart about his restoration a decade earlier, but on that warm fall day, the ghosts of Oulmet, Vardon and Ray were powerful distractions.

**Michigan (1997)**

My quest to further my golf-architecture education never ends, so when I was able to join Tom Doak at **Crystal Downs**—the fabulous Alister MacKenzie/Perry Maxwell collaboration—I felt like a seeker of enlightenment who had been given an audience with the Dalai Lama.

**Minnesota (1993)**

I learned a valuable lesson visiting the Brainerd Lakes region: Don't judge a course by its no-name architect. I'd never heard of designer Joel Goldstrand, but the former Tour pro sculpted 27 wonderful, wooded holes at **Grand View**. Just one downside: mosquitoes the size of commuter planes. (\$94-\$104; 218-963-8755, [grandviewlodge.com](http://grandviewlodge.com))

**Mississippi (2007)**

I played 41 enjoyable holes in one day at **Dancing Rabbit**, whose two Tom Fazio/Jerry Pate designs, the Azaleas and the Oaks, were graced with superb closing holes and a kaleidoscope of colors. (\$75-\$130; 866-447-3275, [dancingrabbitgolf.com](http://dancingrabbitgolf.com))

**Missouri (1992)**

When the heat is on, my game is off. I squeezed in two steamy August rounds at the **Lodge of Four Seasons**, in Lake Ozark. The par 5s on the newer Ridge course ate my lunch, and at the older, Trent Jones Sr.-designed Cove course, I rinsed a sleeve at the



EVAN SCHLEIB

227-yard, par-3 13th (now the 4th), with its daunting lake carry. A steak at H.K.'s took the sting out. (\$80-\$95; 573-365-8574, [4seasonsresort.com](http://4seasonsresort.com))

**Nebraska (2010)**

Despite inhumane July heat and greens like ice, **Sand Hills**, my pick for the greatest course of the last 50 years, more than exceeded the hype. The 18 magnificent holes Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw crafted on the middle-of-nowhere



Michigan's Crystal Downs.

LARRY LAMBERT

## Montana's Big Sky Golf Course.



### Montana (2007)

At **Big Sky Golf Course**, a mountain-ringed Arnold Palmer track, I met a man and wife who said they were the only private landowners within Yellowstone National Park, the result of the family's long-ago trade with the federal government. I accepted their invitation to visit, driving along the Gallatin River, where *A River Runs Through It* was filmed. The dwellings were modest, but their views of the Rockies were remarkable. You never know who you'll meet on the first tee. (\$54-\$72; 406-995-5780. [bigskyresort.com](http://bigskyresort.com))

canvas create the perfect blend of balance, strategy and scenery. I can't wait to go back.

### Nevada (2005)

My first tour of the **Wynn Golf Club** was a pure joy. My sit-down with Steve Wynn that followed? Well, it merely changed how I think about golf design. This brilliant hotelier, who suffers from a degenerative eye disease, appreciates the role that light and shadows play in design and has remarkable theories on how the mind perceives images. It was...eye-opening. (\$300-\$500; 702-770-4653, [wynnlasvegas.com](http://wynnlasvegas.com))

### New Hampshire (2000)

**Bretwood's** South course in Keene has an array of brooks, ponds and wetlands—and a collection of charming covered bridges out of a Norman Rockwell painting. The quintessential New England golf experience. (\$36-\$58; 603-352-7626, [bretwoodgolf.com](http://bretwoodgolf.com))

### New Jersey (2011)

Nope, not my two Pine Valley rounds. For pure memorability, sharing a cart for 18 holes with the charmingly full-of-bluster Donald Trump at his **Bedminster (Old)** course tops all of my Garden State

golf experiences. (As curious as I was about his famously feathery hair, he never removed his red cap.)

### New Mexico (2005)

Some courses should provide caddies. Others, compasses. I played solo at **Black Mesa**, near Santa Fe, an eerie high-desert course that feels isolated from civilization, with prehistoric sandstone cliffs and huge black birds circling. Hogan would have loved it. (\$62-\$87; 505-747-8946, [blackmesagolfclub.com](http://blackmesagolfclub.com))

### New York (2009)

This one's close, but I gotta go with my first round at **National Golf Links of America**, the cradle of American golf design, which I followed with the club's legendary lobster lunch. (Travelin' Joe's other nickname: Ravenous Joe.) Second place: At Winged Foot in 1996, I watched Tiger win his first Tour event on TV. Also in the grill room were Donald Trump and his guest, Sylvester Stallone, who tried to flip channels to football. Cooler heads prevailed.

### North Carolina (1992)

You never forget your first round on **Pinehurst No. 2**. I had local legend Fletcher

looped for Gene Sarazen, Tommy Armour and Curtis Strange. It's a fierce test of short-game nerves. As I strangled my club, his advice ("Slow it down—we're in no hurry") soothed me like a lullaby. (\$360-\$420; 855-235-8507, [pinehurst.com](http://pinehurst.com))

### North Dakota (1999)

I enjoyed each of my six rounds in three days with architect Stephen Kay at his creation then called the **Links of North Dakota at Red Mike Resort**, a fescue-fringed, wind-blown charmer

Pinehurst legend Fletcher Gaines (left).



overlooking Lake Sakakawea. (\$74-\$89; 701-568-2600, [thelinksofnorthdakota.com](http://thelinksofnorthdakota.com))

### Ohio (1996)

My No. 1 Buckeye State moment? I shot my best-ever round at a Pete Dye design now called **Fowler's Mill**, in suburban Cleveland. My even-par 72 included an ace with a 7-wood at the 192-yard, par-3 3rd. Cleveland rocks! (\$44-\$69; 440-729-7569, [fowlersmillgc.com](http://fowlersmillgc.com))

### Oklahoma (2001)

Tulsa in June? Too damn hot. So during the U.S. Open at Southern Hills, three colleagues and I played considerably cooler night golf under the lights at **LaFortune Park's** par-3 layout. We were still hacking away when—*click!*—closing time. Sheesh. How's the song go? "Chicks and ducks and geese better scurry...when the lights go out in a hurry"? (\$14-\$27; 918-496-6200, [lafortunegolfclub.com](http://lafortunegolfclub.com))

### Oregon (2006)

When I first beheld **Bandon Dunes**, I thought it was easily the best thing since cavity-back clubs—especially when a round of bonus golf was served up at the ultra-secretive Sheep Ranch. There, a Bandon staffer unlocked a gate to unleash the firmest, fastest-running seaside course I've ever played. (\$75-\$275; 888-345-6008, [bandondunesgolf.com](http://bandondunesgolf.com))

### Pennsylvania (1995)

**Merion (East)** was a landmark of sorts for me: my 500th course played. With its unparalleled history (Jones in 1930, Hogan in 1950) and wicker-basket flags, it quickly zoomed into my top 5.

### Rhode Island (1996)

A dandy moment in the Ocean State—taking in the ancient, exclusive **Misquamicut Club** in Westerly on an autumn afternoon aflame with burnt-orange colors. Willie Anderson

holes dating to 1895 mix with 1923 Donald Ross beachside holes, and the result is a joyous golf experience.

### South Carolina (1995)

While on a family vacation on Hilton Head Island in 1976, my dad wouldn't spring for the buck-a-hole cost of **Harbour Town**. Yes, Harbour Town cost \$18 back then! I got my chance two decades later, stood even-par after 14 holes, contemplated the enormity of my best-ever round—and bogeyed my way home. Our post-round celebration at the Quarterdeck, by the candy-cane-striped lighthouse, eased my woes. (\$139-\$259; 800-732-7463, [seaplines.com](http://seaplines.com))

### South Dakota (1984)

About a 90-minute drive from Mt. Rushmore, the nine-hole **Wall Community Golf Course** provided me with the novel experiences of paying at the first tee via an honor box, and playing oiled-sand greens. Smoothing a path to the hole with a roller, then raking the "green" upon holing out plain tickled me. Alas, in 2002 an all-grass track replaced the Old World layout. (\$21-\$24; 605-279-4653)

### Tennessee (2001)

Playing hooky from the PGA Championship in Atlanta, I took on **Black Creek Golf Club**, a Brian Silva—channeling—Seth Raynor design with many homages to the master, like deep bunkers and punch-bowl greens.

### Texas (1998)

It was a Saturday morning. I boarded a private plane in Hilton Head, flew to Dallas, checked in at the Four Seasons and played the **TPC at Las Colinas**, the host of the Byron Nelson. A dinosaur-sized steak greeted me at Ill Forks restaurant. The next day, I watched from a luxury box at Texas Stadium as the Oakland Raiders edged the Cowboys 13-12. We then jetted back to

### Chambers Bay in Washington.



### Washington (2008)

A late April snow didn't stop **Chambers Bay** associate designer Jay Blasi and me from teeing off on the municipal layout that's hosting the 2015 U.S. Open. Pelted by an onslaught of hail, I endured end-of-days weather, but the innovative design enthralled me. (\$99-\$205; 253-460-4653, [chambersbaygolf.com](http://chambersbaygolf.com))

Hilton Head. Best. Weekend. Ever. (\$195; 972-717-0700, [fourseasons.com/dallas](http://fourseasons.com/dallas))

### Utah (2006)

St. George, Utah, is one of the most underrated destinations. Red sandstone bluffs mark the landscape, as do lava rocks that line holes 15, 16 and 17 at **Entrada at Snow Canyon**, a private track open to guests who stay at the Inn at Entrada. (\$135-\$170; 435-634-7100, [innatentrada.com](http://innatentrada.com))

### Vermont (2008)

The Golf Club at the **Equinox**, a hilly 1926 Walter Travis design retrofitted by Rees Jones in 1992, radiates Yankee charm. Loaded with elevated greens, it could be a Currier & Ives print, complete with

birches, maples, mountain brooks and a white church steeple rising out of the trees. (\$79-\$115; 802-362-7870, [equinoxresort.com](http://equinoxresort.com))

### Virginia (1992)

My first visit to the Homestead introduced me to the **Cascades**, a William Flynn design that boasts pristine beauty amid tree-covered mountain slopes. I'm still a sucker for that red brick clock tower poking from the trees. (\$195-\$225; 800-838-1766, [thehomestead.com](http://thehomestead.com))

### West Virginia (1993)

Talk about first-tee jitters. Sam Snead himself joined me for my tee time at the **Greenbrier's** Old White course, as did dozens of

onlookers. That night, I helped Sam read the dinner menu (he'd forgotten his glasses) and roared at his endless (and unpublizable) stories. (\$200-\$325; 855-453-4858, [greenbrier.com](http://greenbrier.com))

### Wisconsin (2008)

After rounds on **Blackwolf Run** and **Whistling Straits'** **Straits** course, I added some culinary research projects, including a Two-Horse Hitch sandwich (a burger topped with a sliced bratwurst) for lunch at the Horse & Plow. Dinner at the Whistling Straits clubhouse featured the best sticky toffee pudding I've feasted on in the States. Good thing I had two more courses to walk the next day. (\$185-\$420; 800-618-5535, [americanclubresort.com](http://americanclubresort.com))

### Wyoming (1984)

What I most recall about the **Jackson Hole Golf & Tennis Club**, a Robert Trent Jones Jr. beauty, is the Grand Tetons piercing the heavens in every direction. (\$65-\$195; 307-733-3111, [jhgtc.com](http://jhgtc.com))