

Frost becomes only fifth head golf professional at historic club

by Brad King

The New Face Of Old Town



Charles Frost is well aware that his new job, as head golf professional at Winston-Salem's venerable Old Town Club, is one that carries plenty of historical prestige.

In fact, Frost, who served as a head professional at Kiawah Island's River Course for the past 18 months, becomes only the fifth golf pro at Old Town since the club opened in 1939. Frost replaces Jim Holt, who is retiring at the end of the year after 34 seasons at the helm.

Frost, 39, joins an impressive lineage: Old Town's first pro, Guy Paulson, came to the club from Augusta National Golf Club. Purvis "Purve" Ferree — father of Champions Tour legend Jim Ferree and one of the first inductees in the Carolinas PGA Hall of Fame — followed Paulson at Old Town from 1942-1965, and Joe Annicelli then served as OTC's head pro until Holt took over in 1981.



"The Old Town position has been on a lot of people's radar for a long time because it's such a great club," Frost said. "In golf circles, it's considered one of the top three or four jobs in the Carolinas. It's a pretty rare opening to get — a job that only opens up once every generation or so — one of those unicorn jobs that anyone would want to get. Anyone who had any connection to Old Town was jumping all over it. I never really considered that it might actually work out, but thankfully it has."

Adding to the prestige, the same week the club hired Frost, Old Town catapulted into Golf Magazine's prestigious list of the Top 100 Golf Courses in the United States. Old Town was ranked 78th in the country, the first time the Perry Maxwell design — masterfully restored by Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw two years ago — has cracked the rankings. In addition, Old Town was ranked No. 27 in Golfweek's most recent list of the best "Classic Courses" in the U.S.

A native of Gainesville, Ga., Frost was an All-American golfer at Emory University. Prior to working at The Kiawah Island Club, Frost served for nine years as Director of Instruction at Quail Hollow Club in Charlotte — annual host of the PGA Tour's Wells Fargo Championship, as well as the site of the 2017 PGA Championship and 2021 Presidents Cup.

"It's a fabulous hire," said Old Town Club search committee chairman Dunlop White, who said the club never announced the job opening, instead spending three months quietly searching for appropriate candidates — eventually interviewing six from a list of 30 names.

Early in his career, Frost played professionally on several tours and won the South Carolina Open and North Carolina Open, as well as the Carolinas PGA Assistant's Championship. He finished second at the 2015 Carolinas PGA Section Professional Championship.

By finishing 10th earlier this year at the PGA Professional National Championship in Philadelphia, Frost qualified to play in his first major championship — the PGA Championship at Whistling Straits. It was Frost's fifth attempt to make it via the qualifier for the nation's top club professionals.

Best known as an outstanding instructor, Frost and his star pupil — Ben Martin, a 27-year-old former Clemson All-American who has been steadily climbing the PGA Tour ranks during the past three years — made headlines prior to their arrival at Whistling Straits by being the first student-teacher duo in 37 years to compete together in the same PGA Championship.

"It was a very cool experience having a student (at the tournament)," Frost said. "It was especially comforting to know how much golf we had played together, to make

me feel like I fit in a little more."

Tragically, Frost also made headlines that week for a much different reason. As he and his wife, Elizabeth, were walking out the door for their flight to Whistling Straits on Saturday morning, Frost received a phone call informing him that his close friend and co-worker Mike Townsend — who became the head professional at Kiawah Island's Cassique Course on the same day that Frost started at the River Course — had been killed in a single-car accident on Johns Island.

Just nine days prior to his death, Townsend had won his sectional championship in Myrtle Beach and qualified to choose playing in either the 2016 Wells Fargo Championship or the 2016 Wyndham Championship. In addition, Townsend had been planning to come out to Whistling Straits to support Frost, his close friend for more than a decade, during his first major championship.

"We pushed our flight back by a couple of days to take care of things at Kiawah," Frost said. "I thought about not going (to Whistling Straits). Club professionals are a tight-knit group, particularly your own section."

Instead, knowing his fellow pro would have wanted him to play the PGA Championship, Frost elected to compete in Townsend's honor. He wrote the initials "MT" on his cap and — because Townsend had a predilection for funny, statement-making socks — Frost sported Batman socks one day and Superman socks the next.

Despite the events swirling around him, Frost shot a very respectable 76 in the first round before his second-round 83 left him at 15-over par and outside the cutline.

"It was a very emotional week," said Frost, whose only other PGA Tour appearance came at the 2013 Wells Fargo Championship.

Frost said one of his main goals at Old Town Club is to develop a breeding ground for outstanding assistant professionals he can mentor to move on to prestigious head positions. Starting when he was 18 and throughout his college years, Frost worked summers at Sea Island Golf Club for Scott Davenport — who himself learned under throwback golf professionals such as Davis Love Jr. and Jack Lumpkin. When Davenport got the head professional position at Quail Hollow, he asked Frost to join him.

"Scott used to tell me that the best golf pros are well rounded — ones that can do it all — develop young pros that can do every facet of the business," Frost said. "Our business has become a little more specialized than it used to be. I try to be a throwback in the business by doing all sides."

"I want (assistants) who have a passion for the business and a passion for the game



The Kiawah Team — Russell Henley, Frost and Ben Martin, at the 2016 PGA Championship.

of golf, and have great personalities," he said. "I really feel like I can teach them the nuts and bolts of the industry. The customer service side, I can teach them that, too, but some people just 'get it' better than others. But the passion for golf is what has a great effect on the membership. When they come to the club, they sense that passion for the game."

Frost is equally cognizant of the effect being an outstanding player can have on a golf professional's career. Nevertheless, he said that he only plans to compete in about five or six events per year, including mainstays such as the North and South Carolinas Open, the Sectional Championship and the Club Professionals National Championship.

"I consider playing to be my hobby. As my wife would attest, I'm not all that well rounded a person — I'm kind of a golf nerd," he said. "The job side is where I make my living. I just choose to spend my free time playing, where other people have hobbies such as fishing or something like that."

"Playing is an important part of the business. People give a lot more validity to

your opinions when you are able to play well. My superintendent told me recently that because I can play he gives a lot more thought to following my opinion with various golf course matters. It affects all areas of the business."

During his on-course interview at Old Town, which happened to be the first time he had ever played the golf course, Frost carded a fairly effortless 65, including a 5-under 30 on the finishing nine. "He could have gone a lot lower," White said. "While the entire committee was impressed, we were overwhelmed to learn that Charles played so well with a borrowed set of clubs. His regular set had not returned from Whistling Straits in time for his interview, so he picked up whatever he could find."

If all that wasn't enough, adding to the excitement, Frost and Elizabeth are expecting their first child in mid-December.

"All this other stuff seems big, but that's going to be the biggest life change we have," Frost said with a laugh. "Everything else will be a walk in the park compared to that."