

Bill Ploeger, Glynn Academy grad and celebrated amateur golfer, dies at age 85

- [By BUDDY HUGHES bhughes@thebrunswicknews.com](mailto:bhughes@thebrunswicknews.com)

Murray Poole had a tradition when the Golden Isles Invitational rolled around each year. The longtime sports editor for The Brunswick News would write a column on the invitational's defending champion before that year's tournament.

That meant a lot of calls to talk to Bill Ploeger.

"I had to phone Bill in Columbus 11 times," Poole said with a laugh.

Ploeger — who graduated from Glynn Academy, played golf at Georgia Tech and was one of the top amateur and senior amateur golfers — died Aug. 27 in Columbus while playing golf at Green Island Country Club. He collapsed while playing and was taken to the Piedmont Columbus Regional emergency room, where he was pronounced dead according to the Columbus Ledger-Enquirer. He was 85 years old.

Ploeger had numerous golf victories in his career, but he was a multi-sport athlete coming out of Glynn Academy. He had scholarship offers in football and basketball, but chose to pursue golf at Georgia Tech, where he would captain the team in 1963 while earning NCAA All-American honorable mention honors.

After Tech, Ploeger would go on to have a decorated amateur career on the links. Those victories would include winning the Georgia Senior Championship four times and capturing the prestigious USGA Senior Amateur in 1999.

Ploeger is best known in the Isles for his exploits at Brunswick Country Club, which hosts the annual Golden Isles Invitational.

Ploeger won his first Invitational in 1971 with a little unexpected help. Steve Melnyk, a Brunswick native and a great amateur golfer in his own right, had to leave the tournament to travel to Britain to play in The Open Championship.

That left a three-way fight for the victory between Ploeger, another golfer and Steve Spurrier — before he would go on to a hall of fame career as a college football coach.

"He went on to beat both Spurrier and the other golfer," Poole said. "I think that's when the Bill Ploeger legend started. He was the top senior amateur player in the country for years."

Ploeger went on to win 10 more times in Brunswick.

“When you would interview him after a win, he’d start off by saying ‘how’s your family, how are you doing,’ just concerned with your personal being before we got into breaking down how he played,” Poole said.

“He had more class than most people who’ve ever been. He was a longtime friend.”

Ploeger’s accolades into induction into many halls of fame including the Georgia Tech Sports Hall of Fame, the Georgia Golf Hall of Fame, the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame and the Glynn County Sports Hall of Fame.

In 2023, when Poole received the J.B. Hawkins Humanitarian Award from the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame, Ploeger was there to celebrate with him. The two posed for a photo with another one of the honorees that night — former Georgia football coach Mark Richt.

“I’ll always cherish that, getting to pose with him,” Poole said. “That was the last time I saw him.”