

# Sister's Challenge spurred Maurycy to golf career

## 'i bet you can't beat me'

BY JIM SCHILTZ *Gazette Reporter*



The 20th annual Schenectady City School District Athletic Hall of Fame and Reunion Dinner was held on Sept. 11 at Proctors. The 2017 inductees, from left, are Paul Della Villa, Mechelle Smith and John Maurycy.

MARC SCHULTZ/ GAZETTE PHOTOGRAPHER

SCHENECTADY — It was a challenge that changed everything, a gesture that swayed John Maurycy from the basketball court and baseball diamond to the golf course.

The 79-year-old Mont Pleasant High School graduate remembers that day well, and was certain to recall it when he stepped to the podium for his induction speech into the Schenectady City School District Athletic Hall of Fame at Proctors on Sept. 11.

“My older sister [Sylvia] got me started,” said Maurycy, a longtime Niskayuna resident. “She said, ‘Why don’t you go out and play with dad?’ I didn’t really want to and she said, ‘I bet you can’t beat me.’ Basketball was my best sport and I was a pretty good pitcher, and those were the sports I was into. At 13, that’s when I started playing golf.”

By the age of 16, Maurycy won the Schenectady County Amateur Golf Championship. By 21, he was playing as a professional, and his career included consecutive appearances in the U.S. Open from 1963-65, a two-year stint on the PGA Tour in 1966-67, and an appearance in the 1971 PGA Championship.

“I applied for one job in my life,” Maurycy said.

Maurycy said he learned the game by watching established veterans like the late Armand Farina, a 2011 SCSD Athletic Hall of Fame inductee, and plenty of trial and error. In 1954, playing for Mont Pleasant coaching great Sig Makofski, he helped the Red Raiders win the state high school championship.

“Back then there were no videos, and hardly any books,” Maurycy said. “You picked up a club and played. I didn’t go



PROVIDED PHOTO

John Maurycy shows his form in this 1966 photo.

to a country club. I hit balls and had to pick them up. At the driving range they used balls that were all cut up, but that's what you had to work with. It was a different time."

Maurycy went pro after a two-year stint in the Army, and in 1960 he won the Eastern New York Golf Championship. A few years later, he was playing in U.S. Opens, where he missed the cut by two strokes in 1963 and by one stroke in 1964. He made several cuts later as a PGA Tour member, where one of his favorite playing partners was the late, great Gene Sarazen, and competed in a handful of PGA Professional Championships.

"I was playing with the big boys," Maurycy said. "I wasn't super strong off the tee, but I was very solid, and I liked to compete. The thing is, I didn't practice a lot because of my day job."

Throughout his adult playing career, Maurycy worked as an assistant and head professional at several courses, capped by a long run at Mohawk Golf Club in Niskayuna.

"Golf is a very, very difficult sport, and if I could do it over ... I'd probably do it the same," Maurycy said. "When I was at work it was, 'I've got to take care of business.' I didn't know how to spell 'No.' I worked. I got that from my father [Stanley]. I'd get through with work, and then at 8:30, 9 o'clock at night, I used to hit balls."

Rick Wolcott, the head pro at Pioneer Hills Golf Course in Ballston Spa, worked with Maurycy in the late 1960s and early '70s.

"With him, the job was number one," Wolcott said. "When he went to Mohawk, even more so."

Maurycy was still able to win numerous tournaments, though, and in 1970 and 1979 he was the Northeastern New York PGA medalist. Last year, he was inducted into Northeastern New York PGA Hall of Fame.

"I remember he'd go weeks and never shoot over 70," Wolcott said. "He drove the ball straight, and his short game was incredible. He'd get five balls in a bunker and get five up and downs. He could chip."

### **ABILITY TO LOCK IN**

Maurycy said staying in the moment was among his playing strengths, and that ability to lock in enabled him to set course records at Mt. Anthony Golf Course, Schuyler Meadows Club, Mohawk Golf Club and Walhalla Country Club.

"One shot at a time," he said. "Don't think ahead. Don't think back. One shot at a time is all you can do with the ball. It only takes one bad shot to get an eight."

Maurycy was the head pro at Walhalla Country Club from 1967-71, and spent 25 years as the head pro at Mohawk Golf Club through 1998. Later, after he retired, he worked part-time at the Northway Golf Center from 1999-2013.

“He mentored so many young people. I could name a thousand kids he helped.”

Maurycy's advice to those he taught?

“In golf, there is a lot of time to think,” said the father of five daughters, including Tiffany Maurycy, a multi-Northeastern Women's Golf Association champion. “When you stop thinking, you play your best.”