

Martin Smith, Northern Club Professional 1939 - 1950

Martin Smith was appointed Club Professional at Northern on 11th March 1939. He had learned his golf under Arthur Le Fevre at Royal Melbourne. He won the Assistants' Championship by 7 shots at Victoria in December 1933 in a field where all players were under 21. Martin was assistant club professional at Kingston Heath and Royal Melbourne, then professional at Geelong before his appointment at Northern. He served at Northern until 1950.

Martin Smith was an outstanding professional golfer, won numerous titles including events at Commonwealth, Metropolitan, Kingston Heath at age 19, and at Albert Park, and set course records at Croydon (64) in 1934, Royal Melbourne (67) in 1939 playing in the Australian Open Championships and at Long Island (67) in 1940. He also broke the course record at Commonwealth in a practice round by 3 shots. Royal Melbourne made a special presentation to Martin after the Open Championship to recognise his course record score.

Martin Smith at 6 feet and 18 stone was an imposing player on the golf course, a hard-hitting giant as described by the West Australian newspaper: *"He is no stylist but is a magnificent iron player and is seen at his best in match play. He spears long iron shots up to the pin better than any other Australian professional"*.

Martin Smith played his golf in the Norman Von Nida era and regularly challenged The Von and Ossie Pickworth and later Kel Nagle in major events in Australia. Martin became our Club Professional when golf at Northern was dominated by another Smith family, Alan, Ron and Ray and at the time, in 1940, when Northern became the first non-sandbelt club to win the Division One Pennant.

Martin who, as Royal Melbourne assistant, had defeated the State Champion, Ted Naismith at the 37th hole in Adelaide in 1935 and had crashed his car on Point Nepean Road on his way to Portsea in the same year won the State Professional Championship at Commonwealth in December 1939. The Second World War interrupted his golf career but he was invited by the PGA as State Champion to play in a series of exhibition matches to aid war charities in 1940 – 1941 and matches were arranged on leading Melbourne courses. He was particularly involved in Pro Golf Challenge matches against Norman von Nida and the Northern members put up one hundred pounds in support of Martin Smith to match the same by Von Nida for their winner-take-all match in 1941.

The Argus, Saturday 13 September 1941, **"Golf Stars in Challenge"** reported:

"Large galleries are expected at Royal Melbourne today and at Northern on Sunday to watch the 72 holes challenge golf match between Norman von Nida (NSW) and Martin Smith (Victorian Professional Champion).

'Today beginning at 10.30am and 2.30pm, the first 36 holes will be played over the West Course at Royal Melbourne. The final 36 holes will be at Northern, Glenroy, tomorrow.

'A bus service has been arranged to meet Black Rock trams at Cheltenham Rd today and special trains will leave Flinders St. for Glenroy on Sunday at 9.44am and 1.29pm.'

The Argus reported that in the week prior to the much-publicised challenge Martin Smith had a good round of 72 at Kingston Heath and Von Nida visited Northern for a practice round and then shot 73 on the West Course at Royal Melbourne. The article re-stated the starting times for the matches and the special travel arrangements to enable those interested to attend.

The Argus, 14 September 1941, **Von Nida defeats Smith**, reported;

"After a close and gruelling match Von Nida, the Sydney champion defeated Martin Smith, Victorian Professional Champion, 2 and 1 at Royal Melbourne and Northern.

"The match finished dramatically at the 71st hole when Von Nida, two feet from the hole and stymied by Smith's ball 10 inches from the hole chipped over for a half to win 2 and 1."

The newspapers reported that about 1200 saw the first half of the match at Royal Melbourne and about 1300 were at Northern.

Ted Naismith, the Australian Pro Golf Championship holder, not wanting to be left out of the action, issued a challenge to the winner of the Martin Smith – Von Nida game but requested that if his challenge was accepted that the match, to be played for patriotic funds, take place in November as he had been concentrating more on teaching than playing at that time. It was later reported that a team of professional golfers had played a match against Northern members and had raised twenty two pounds seven shillings for war funds. Martin Smith with 73 was the leading professional in the scratch event.

Martin continued his success in golf after the war winning a Queensland purse in August 1946 by 6 shots, and a 200 pounds purse at Manly defeating Ossie Pickworth by one shot with Kel Nagle 5 shots behind on 149. The Argus also reported that he had shared first place with Ossie Pickworth in the 1947 Northern Open but was beaten by promising amateur Peter Thomson in the Northern Open in September 1948. In 1953 Martin Smith started the professional golf season winning the Peter Scott purse at Kingswood ahead of Jack Harris and Ossie Pickworth. It was reported that during the event Bill English killed a snake at the 10th. He also played a number of exhibition and charity matches after the war in aid of Red Cross and the Lord Mayor's Camp at Portsea.

Northern member, Geoff Tobin, has presented the Club with a short film of the match between Norman von Nida and Martin Smith taken by his father, Kevin.