

GOLF LESSONS

by **SUTTON RETTIG**

photography by **PAOLO CASCIO**



BHS Alumnus Gary Hallberg is a professional golfer who has played on the PGA Tour, Nationwide Tour, and Champions Tour. He stopped by the Barrington Hills Country Club in June while touring in the Midwest.

What is involved in becoming an elite athlete? Depending on their sport, some athletes gain popularity through exuberant emotion and intensity. Some are known for letting their play speak for itself. For other sports, fans judge an athlete based on continuity and an ability to maintain a high level of success during each stage of his or her career. Gary Hallberg, a championship golfer and Barrington High School alumnus, has dedicated himself to the game of golf since he was a boy.



Gary Hallberg and Mark Esler

GARY HALLBERG ACCOMPANIED HIS PARENTS and siblings in a move to Barrington when he was 11 years old. He would soon develop a deep love for the game of golf that is still fueled today.

In an effort to constantly improve his skills, a young Hallberg often played at Thunderbird, now known as Makray Memorial Golf Club, beginning as early as 4:30 a.m. until 9:15 p.m. during his summer vacation. Even as a teenager, he understood how critical it was to practice.

"Golf was my sanctuary," Hallberg says. "I think that's why I loved it so much. And it was fun. And I was pretty good at it, too."

Hallberg eventually showcased his talents during his freshman year at Barrington High School. He immediately went on to win in a qualifying round that year and earned a position on the BHS golf team with ease. In the midst of his high school career, Hallberg also noticed the importance of seeking out advice from his peers and mentors.

One aspect of building success is an athlete's ability to keep a good mindset, and treating each stroke calmly. Hallberg mentioned one particular issue he faced, and that was being overanalyzing.

"The problem I always had was thinking ahead, all the time. I'd think about tomorrow when I would be winning or I couldn't go to sleep, constantly worrying about that kind of thing. I got a sports psychologist when I turned pro, and he helped me to get in the zone and stay focused on being in the here and now. To quiet my mind. Put myself in a place where my mind was quiet and then visualize what I wanted of my swing. He helped me to take control of my life as far as my golf game primarily, and helped me get myself in the zone, and be in the present moment."

From a fan's standpoint, an athlete's image can potentially be smeared if they develop egotistical qualities once they reach the height of their success. For Gary Hallberg, he remained as humble and genuine a person as any one person can be.

JUST A GAME

"I suppose to stay really good at something, you spend a lot of time alone. You have to believe; you have to have confidence... "It's just a game, you know, I play a game. The times that I did win tournaments, for the next week

or two, people would congratulate me all the time. I have lunch or dinner with a lot of these superstar golfers and they can't have dinner because they're busy signing autographs. I could see when they would have a little problem with that. I think as you get older, it's just a game. You're very fortunate just to be able to do it."

Another unique aspect of life as a professional athlete is setting an example for future generations, both inside and outside the playing field, while also leading by example.

"You work hard at something and you feel good about it, but we're all just trying to do the best we can with what we have" Hallberg says. "That's what I tell my kids.

That's all you can do."

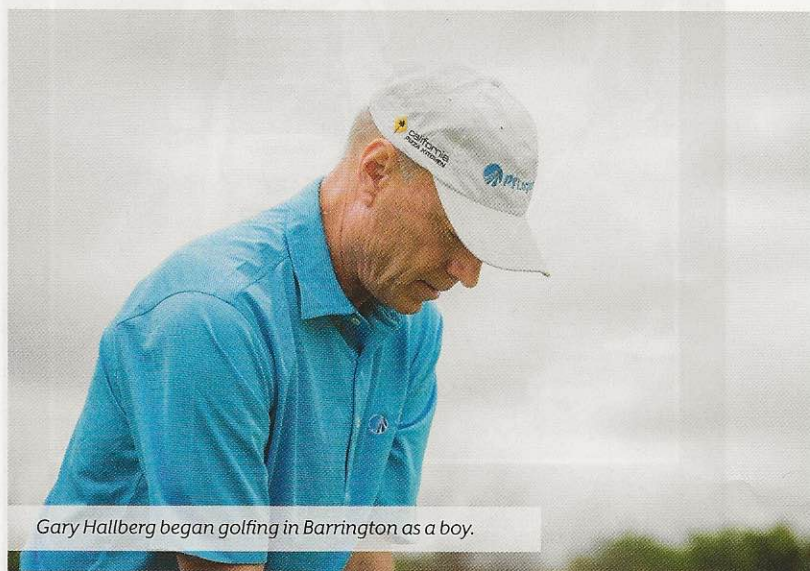
Hallberg made a habit of offering advice to young golf protégées who are eager to learn more about the game.

"I try to say to them, 'There's no destination.' It's not like you're gonna go here, and then you're there. It's a journey. Everyday feels a little different. You get your swing just where you want it, and you think you can keep it there. Then two days later it's like, 'what happened? Where did it go?' The feelings change, you have to keep reinventing yourself. Enjoy the journey. I think that's a big thing. It's a great journey—it's better than most."

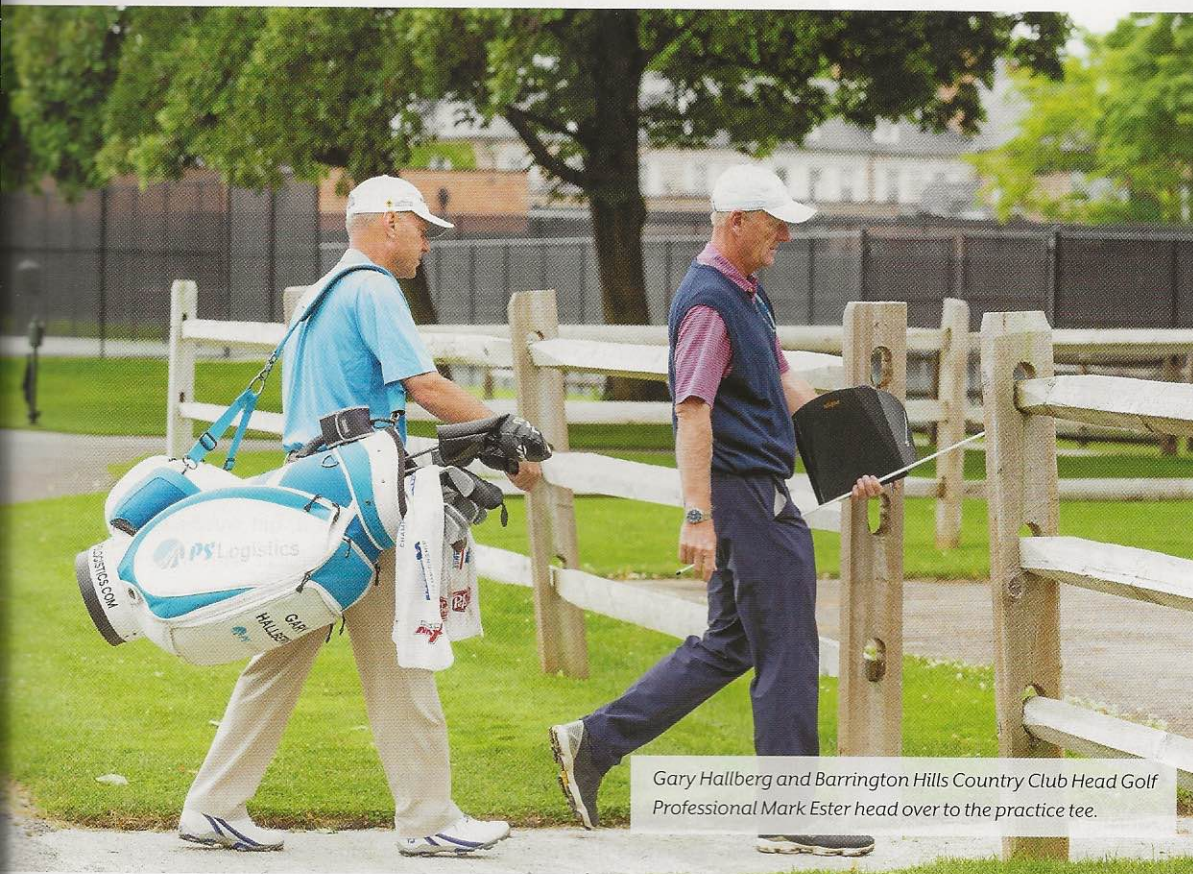
When reminiscing about his road to stardom, Hallberg illustrated a memory involving his guidance counselor at BHS, Bob Murphy.

"A lot of times, a person will say something to you that makes a difference. I was in high school sitting in class, but I hear my name being called over the intercom: Gary Hallberg, please come to your counselor's office. I'm thinking, 'that can't be good'. My guidance counselor, Bob Murphy, sits me down in his office and says 'Your English teacher felt concerned because you're not giving 100 percent in class. What do you have to say for yourself?'

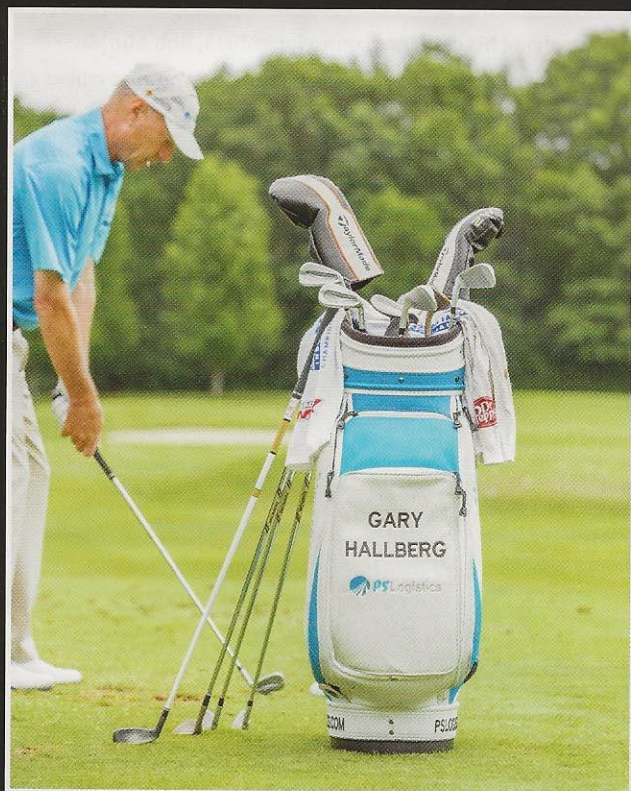
Hallberg felt as though honesty would be his best move in this situation.



Gary Hallberg began golfing in Barrington as a boy.



Gary Hallberg and Barrington Hills Country Club Head Golf Professional Mark Ester head over to the practice tee.



"It was always about 'follow your dream', and that was kind of a theme. 'Do what you love' and golf was what I loved." —Gary Hallberg

"Mr. Murphy, I appreciate your concern, but I'm going to be on the PGA Tour someday and English really isn't that important to me right now."

Taken aback by this comment, his guidance counselor regrouped and responded by saying, "Gary, that's good enough for me. You go out on that PGA Tour. I'll go talk to your teacher."

As it would turn out, his counselor's response made a big impact on Hallberg's schooling.

"I walked out of there knowing, 'That guy's on my side.' It motivated me to start studying. I didn't want to disappoint him. I was happy to do my work."

Hallberg mentioned that had his guidance counselor been abrasive, it would've given him a bad attitude. Instead, his

counselor gave an authentic response, which proved to have a monumental impact on his life.

Years later, the "follow your dream" ideology preached by his parents still has enormous impact on this accomplished golfer. Their support stemmed from the fact that Hallberg clearly loved the game and, knowing that, they were happy for him.

Throughout his illustrious career, he's remained a humble and gracious man. Nearly four decades after joining the Boys Golf team at BHS, he is still actively playing the game, and hopes to win another tournament in the near future. As he reflects on his career up to today, he makes a point of acknowledging how important his family, friends, and peers were to his journey.

"Anything I've ever done and been able to do is from other people helping me. I was helped along the way, every step."



PHOTO: LINDA BARRETT

Sutton Rettig is a sophomore at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. His favorite subject is English and he writes a variety of essays where he can openly articulate various thoughts and ideas. For leisure, he enjoys watching sports, attending concerts, reading books, and spending time with friends. *Editor's Note: Our thanks to Barrington Hills Country Club and Head Golf Pro Mark Esler, Dan Palmer, and Gary Hallberg for their support with this story.