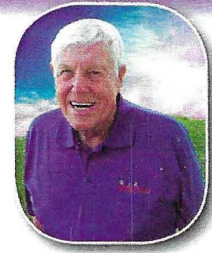


The "Iron Man" of Golf- 1,850 Holes of Golf In One Week

Editorial and Photos by Alan Hoskins, Feature Writer



So you think you play a lot of golf, or that you play faster than most.

Then meet golf's "Iron Man," Bob Kurtz, who plays more golf and at a faster pace than anyone in the world. According to the *Guinness Book of World Records*, Kurtz holds five world golf

records (including one that was broken twice). They are:

- 1,850 holes of golf in one week.
- Shooting his age seven times - in one day.
- Fastest 18 holes - 39 minutes and 5 seconds.
- Fastest 72 holes - 3 hours and 5 minutes.
- Most consecutive holes without stopping - 500 in 39 hours.

A former sportscaster and part of CNN's first broadcasting team, Kurtz started his assault on the world record book while serving as the pastor of St. John's Evangelical Protestant Church in Cullman, AL, right in the center of North Alabama's bevy of great golf courses. The record chases were not without good causes - fundraising for neglected children and other worthwhile charities.

"Everything we do is to publicize and promote 'Ministries To Children' as part of our drive to help single moms and their children and to challenge young men to recognize the responsibilities of fatherhood - whether married or not - is needed," stresses Kurtz.

Now before you decide to take a crack at some of the records, there are some things you need to know.

No. 1, *Guinness* required official adjudicators to witness two of the records - the 1,850 holes in a week and shooting his age seven times in one day. And adjudicators don't come cheap - \$7,000 for the rights to the event plus air fare and lodging for adjudicators from the New York office of London-based *Guinness*. The other three records were recorded through certification by two scorers and two witnesses.

No. 2, Kurtz needed his own course, in this case Quail Creek in Hartselle, AL that closed down for a week for Kurtz' record chase. In addition, Kurtz rented a 20-room motel on the course for himself, his family and his entire team. "A course must be at least 6,500 yards for *Guinness* to consider it for any records," says Kurtz, who was 70 at the time.

No. 3, Kurtz had help - nearly 100 volunteers in five teams over the seven days. "My only granddaughter, Christi, kept eight golf balls teed up on each hole for seven days while my six grandsons would stand on the back of the golf cart, and while I would screech up to inches of the green, they would leap out, grab the flag and then after I putted out they would retrieve the ball from the cup, replace the flag and dash for the cart which was already heading for the next tee. We calculated that we saved 20-30 seconds every hole. Saving 20 seconds a hole allows you to play a lot more holes."

If you do the math, 1,850 holes (102 rounds) figures out to about 14½ rounds of 18 holes a day. Playing from sun-up to sun-down and then some longer using glow balls, he broke the marathon

record set by Troy Grant in Australia in 2004 despite spells of dehydration, sore hands, sore feet, blood blisters, record-setting heat and nihtlr IV drips, Hi iYin\ i score for 18 holes was 74.55, and he's shot his age six times.

The other record of which he's most proud is shooting his age seven times in one day. At age 70 at the time, he played 10 rounds that day with a best round of 67. "We think on the pro tour I've shot my age more than anyone but there are no such records," says Kurtz. "The first time I shot my age I was 63, and thought that might be a record only to find out Walter Morgan shot 60 on the Champions Tour."

The fastest 72 holes (3:05) and the fastest round (39:05) came the same day at Chesley Oaks in Cullman and was held in support of the course's "While We're Young" year-long theme emphasizing picking up the pace of play. "The last round, I broke par and finished in under 40 minutes," he remembers.

Of all the records, the consecutive record for holes played may be the most unique. "We switched to a glow ball at night and had three Gator carts from maintenance, two in the fairway and one right behind me," said Kurtz. "The headlights were pretty substantial, and as soon, as I struck the ball, the guys in the Gator behind me would turn the light off so the guys in the fairway could see the ball." Kurtz broke that record twice, erasing the previous record of 400 with 405 consecutive holes and then stretching it to 500.

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Now 77, Kurtz is still not done - he hopes this year to take a shot at playing 1,000 holes in four days.

Kurtz doesn't know how much money he's raised for charity - "Easily over a quarter of a million dollars and maybe closer to \$500,000," he says. The week-long 1,850 holes raised \$102,000, much of which went to the victims of a tornado that devastated Cullman in April of 2011.

The biggest single day fund-raiser came when Kurtz was asked to play as many holes as he could for the St. John's Church Missions Committee to raise funds to help an orphanage in Kenya. "They got people to pledge \$1 or \$5 or whatever for each hole I played. One guy pledged \$50. Everyone figured I'd play 36 holes, maybe 54. The course was not reserved, but they had signs asking to please 'let the guy through.' I played 188 holes, and we raised a bit more than \$50,000. That's when I got interested in marathons.



Golf Writer Alan Hoskins (on right) meets and interviews 77-year-old Bob Kurtz, known as the "Iron Man" of golf and holder of Guinness world records for marathon golf. Kurtz can be found virtually every day at Terri Pines Country Club in Cullman, AL; a picturesque tree-lined course Kurtz calls "a modest Augusta National" and Alabama's best kept golf secret.

It was so successful, I played 220 holes the next year but the pledges went way down, and it wasn't as successful [\$35,000]."

A widower, Kurtz lives just off the eighth tee on Terri Pines Country Club in Cullman where he's been a member for the past 20 years. "In my mind, Terri Pines is kind of a modest Augusta National, especially with all the flowers, tall pines, water [on 16 of 18 holes] and elevation changes. You don't get courses like it very often," says Kurtz, who has played Augusta, the Old Course at St. Andrews and other great venues several times.

Often referred to as "TP Country Club," Terri Pines is one of those great "feel good" stories in golf. Feeling that for Cullman (population 20,000) to be successful economically, it needed a country club, so Bert McGriff built Terri Pines in 1979, and then a year later gave the club to its members. Unfortunately, with two other courses in Cullman, the membership bailed out seven years ago - and McGriff took the course back.

"Bert loves to contribute to the community," says Kurtz. "It's not been a money maker for him and his family, but his love for the course runs much deeper than that. It's the best kept golf secret in Alabama. As long as Bert McGriff is alive [he still frequents the course at age 91], the course will be there. He has such a great love of golf and the community."

"We owe everything to Bert," agrees Director of Golf John Hunt. "We can never thank him for what he's done for this community." While a private club, Hunt stresses, "guests" are always more than welcome to what is a terrific golf course. **Fb**