

## Feature of The Month ►

# Randy Towner — From Sand Greens to Augusta and Beyond

**Midwest PGA Section President has played  
an estimated 60 of 100 top golf courses.**

*by Alan Hoskins, Feature Writer*

**F**rom sand greens to Augusta National, Pebble Beach, and the Old Course at Saint Andrews, it's been a storied career for Randy Towner.

In his 42nd year in the business, golf has taken Towner pretty much around the world and on the course playing encounters with the likes of such diverse personalities as NBA legend Michael Jordan, vocalists Johnny Mathis and Alice Cooper, and world-renown dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov.

"I've got to do a lot of things in my life because of golf," says Towner, (photo below) who is in his 11th year as general manager and head professional at Firekeeper Golf Course in Mayetta about 15 miles north of Topeka — one of Kansas' premier golf courses. Towner has also worked at such prestigious courses as Alvamar, Wolf Creek, and St. Andrews — all several levels above the sand greens of years past.



▲ Assistants Mike Powell (left) and Tarell Ramsey (right) make up two-thirds of Randy Towner's (center) golf staff at Firekeeper Golf Course. Former Kansas State golfer Jane Yi (not in photo) is the third member of the staff.



"I played a number of years before I ever played on anything but sand greens," remembers Towner, who started playing at about the age of three. "My dad [John] loved golf, and we played on a 9-hole sand green course just off K-7 past Bonner Springs. I think they called it something like the Kansas City teachers course. My dad, who is now 92 and still playing golf, and the dad of Jay Lispi [longtime head professional at Tomahawk] were good friends, so Jay and I played a lot on sand greens. Then the dads joined Dub's Dread, and we played a lot there and then joined Lake Quivira Country Club."

Towner lived in DeSoto until sixth grade when the family moved to Shawnee. He attended Shawnee Mission North High School his sophomore year, then transferred to Shawnee Mission Northwest when it opened. "We went to the state tournament at North, which was cool," says Towner. "And then I won the Sunflower League championship at Victory Hills when I was a senior. It was really neat at Northwest because we had all the good golfers from Lake Quivira, and we were terrible at all the other sports being a new school, so being a golfer was awesome."

Graduating from Shawnee Mission Northwest in 1971, Towner spent two years at Johnson County Community College (JCCC), where he helped the Cavaliers qualify for the NJCAA national tournament both years, earned NJCAA All-American honors, and now is a member of the JCCC Hall of Fame. While at JCCC, he also worked at St. Andrews, a part-time position that started him on his professional career. An assistant three years, he built professional relationships with such Kansas City legends as Stan Thirsk, Everett Van Zant, Carl Pugh, Duke Gibson, and Buster Mills. In his first pro event, Towner defeated (Kansas City Golf Hall of Famer) Bob Stone in a playoff.

He joined John Bonella at Wolf Creek for two years, returned to St. Andrews for three years, and he then got his first job as head professional at Meadowbrook Country Club. After four years there, he began a 22-year career at Alvamar in Lawrence — and a life-changing relationship with another newcomer to Lawrence.

"It was late 1988 or early 1989, and I came into my office, and there was a note that said, 'Sorry I missed you. My name is Roy Williams, and I'm the new basketball coach at KU, and I love golf.' So, I went to the KU basketball office and left a note that said, 'Sorry I missed you. I'm Randy Towner. I'm the new golf pro at Alvamar, and I love basketball.'"



*(Above) While he's traveled the world, raising daughters, (from left) Libby, Katie, and Abby (far right), are No. 1 on the Hit Parade for Midwest PGA Section Hall of Famer Randy Towner and wife LeAnn.*

*(Below) Roy and Wanda Williams (left) and LeAnn and Randy Towner flank a statue of Payne Stewart at Pinehurst Country Club, one of the many trips that have taken them to an estimated 60 of the world's top 100 golf courses. (All photos courtesy Randy Towner.)*



TeeTimesMagazine.com

Since then, Towner and Williams have taken countless golf trips around the world. "Normally four or five trips a year," says Towner. "We've probably played 60 of the top 100 courses in the world, Augusta, Pebble Beach, St. Andrews, and met a lot of people. I've played with Michael Jordan a couple of times, and Mikhail Baryshnikov was just an awesome guy."

The Towner-Williams relationship carried over to one of Towner's playing highlights. The twosome took on KU basketball coach Bill Self and course designer and a four-time winner on the PGA TOUR, Notah Begay, in a 9-hole exhibition that officially opened Firekeeper in 2011—an exhibition in which Towner birdied the first three holes. "It was cold and windy but so much fun," remembers Towner. "I played so well that day, four birdies in nine holes. It was so good to have Roy and Bill come and play."


Competitively, Towner boasts an awesome resume. He's been the Assistant Player of the year, the Player of the Year, and the Senior Player of the Year in the Midwest Section PGA and won the Section championship twice. He played in the Senior U.S. Open at Whistling Straits in 2007, qualified for the PGA club professional championship five times, and the Senior PGA club Professional Championship six times.

Inducted into the Midwest Section PGA Hall of Fame in 2010, he's a two-time Midwest Section PGA Merchandiser of the Year. He's currently serving his third year as president of the Section, an association he's served in numerous capacities in his 42 years of membership.

Towner's move from Alvamar to Firekeeper took his career to another level. "In the twilight of a career, it's pretty neat to start with a blank canvas," he reflects. "Everything was pretty much established at the other courses, so it's been fun to do a course the way I wanted to do it, like picking out flagsticks, decorating, and other things. It's a fun business; I can't wait to go to work each day.

"And I've got an awesome staff. Michael Powell has been with me since the beginning. I met Tarell Ramsey at the golf show, and he wanted to get into the business, and it worked out to perfection. And Jane Yi is a former Kansas State golfer from Topeka who worked for me at Alvamar."

While he's traveled the world and met countless celebrities, his greatest pride is found at home raising daughters Libby, Katie, and Abby, with his wife of 41 years, LeAnn, a nurse at Lawrence Memorial Hospital. Together, they have nine grandchildren. Libby and Jamie Lamberson have three girls; Katie and Steven Davis have two boys and two girls; Abby and Scott Wempe (golf pro at Manhattan Country Club) have two boys. All three were on the "Classy Cat" pom team at Kansas State.

"With LeAnn working as a nurse and me working lots of hours, to raise three awesome daughters is the ultimate highlight," said Towner. "I think that nurses understand having to work holidays and weekends, and we were able to somehow make it work. It takes a strong woman to be married to a golf pro, and LeAnn is certainly that." 



*Alan Hoskins, Golf Writer  
Lead Feature Writer since 2007  
TEE TIMES GOLF GUIDE™ Magazine*

TEE TIMES GOLF GUIDE

December 2020

17