



# Links Players

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## Golf Helps

*...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners... [old golf pros] (I Timothy 1:15)*

The best day of my teenage life was the day my father joined Tates Creek Country Club in Lexington, Ky. Instead of playing at my “par-three” course, this was a real 18-hole golf course with a real golf professional.

The summer of 1966 became eighteen in the morning, a cheeseburger for lunch, with another eighteen to follow.

The Tates Creek golf pro, Humzey Yessin, would be on a shortlist for the Dos Equis beer commercial’s “most interesting man in the world. Humzey was born in 1927 to Muslim parents who immigrated from Syria to Harlan County, Kentucky.

Just imagine, if you can, a Muslim family deep in the hillbilly mountains of Kentucky, where most religious people were either snake-handling Pentecostals or bootlegging Baptists.

Humzey was a star for the 1944 State Championship basketball Harlan Dragons. He nearly signed with the Red Sox but couldn’t imagine where Boston might be. Instead, he went to the University of Kentucky, hoping to play basketball and baseball.

He was too short for Adolph Rupp’s championship teams but became the student manager for a team that won three NAAs and became the 1948 USA Olympic team.

I first encountered Humzey as a 15-year-old kid who could barely break 90. My main memory of Humzey was the day I ran a golf cart over some flowers near the pro shop.

Humzey delivered a scorching speech. God was mentioned, but his last name was damn, and Humzey was not praising the Lord.

Indeed, while Humzey grew up “Muslim,” in truth, he was just a ‘nothing.’ To my knowledge, he never set foot in a church or mosque in his whole life—except for funerals of friends, which is where this story really begins.

Humzey’s assistant pro was Bob Nelson, a 25-year-old kid whose primary love was booze. Bob was miraculously converted at age 35 and eventually became a pastor.

When Bob suddenly died in 2008, he left instructions that I should be his eulogizer and Humzey should be a pallbearer. He left a detailed message entitled “Golf Helps.” Bob preached his own funeral through me.

The next day, we invited Humzey to our Links Fellowship, which met in the country club’s bar. He showed up. And he loved it. No one pressured him. He just came and enjoyed his hot tea in the bar, listening with special interest when we got into some Old Testament stories that included his beloved Syrian ancestors.

He was well past 80. He fell in love with the gospel story- the good news that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

August 20, 2015 was a day to remember. Humzey was baptized in the golf course swimming pool. He confessed his faith in Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. He was 87. Humzey finally left us in September at age 95 for his new home with Jesus.

Sure enough, Bob Nelson was right... “Golf Helps”.

The great game of golf helped an 87-year-old Syrian Muslim friend find Jesus.  
So, remember- it is never too late!

**Prayer: Thank you, Lord that it is never too late! Your grace is available to all.**

—

Tim Philpot

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