

Giants of Golf

Robert Danziger

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Sideshow Legends and Same Length, Long Golf Clubs



In San Francisco, Jack stays at the Palace Hotel, where his bed is nine feet long and six feet wide.



MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Johnny, the Philip Morris midget, with the tiny Dancing Dolls and the Fischers, famed circus giants. (see pg. 262)



THE REICHERT FAMILY

Linda, Leonard, Gilbert, Irene, Dick, Gil, Sr.
Family Photo of only Giant in World on Exhibition

**THE TALLEST MAN ON EXHIBITION
GILBERT REICHERT**

Height—8 ft. 4 in. Weight 315 lbs.
38 Years Old Size 20 Shoes

MY LIFE STORY

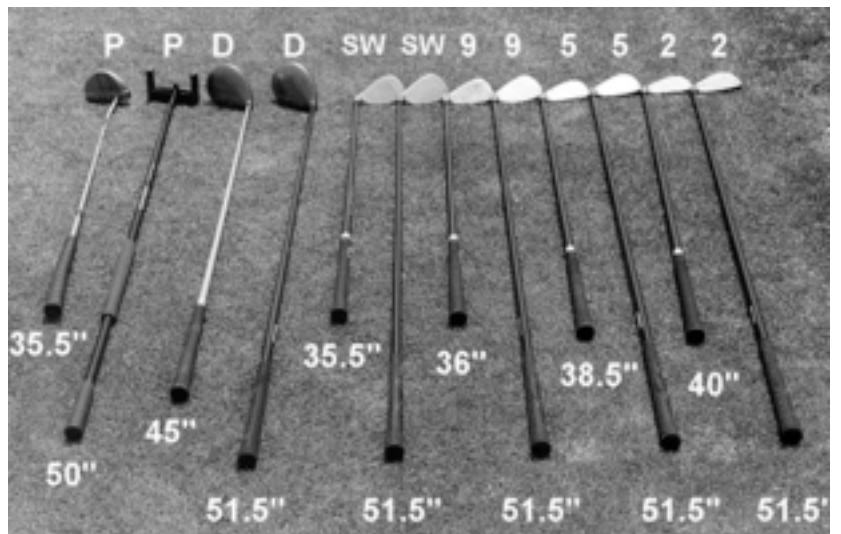
Born November 9th, 1912.
Birthplace—Cleveland, Ohio.
Weight at Birth—13 Pounds.
Father—6 Foot, 8 inches Tall.
Mother—5 Foot, 3 inches Tall.
Brothers—7 Foot 2 inches—6 Foot 5 inches.
Sister—6 Foot 2 inches Tall.
Wife—5 Foot 2 inches Tall.
Children—Gilbert II, 7 years, 4 ft. 7 in., 62 lbs.
Leonard—5 years, 3 ft. 9½ in., 45 lbs.
Linda, 1 year, 31 inches, 20 lbs.

Married and the father of four children who appear in photograph. Doctors are very much interested in children as it is the first case in the history of medicine where a giant has married a normal woman and the marriage has produced children. At this time children appear to be a little taller than normal.

All clothes specially made. Athletically inclined taking part in swimming, golfing and formerly having toured with the House of David Basketball Team. Sleeps in a special bed 8 feet 5 inches long.

Gilbert Reichert





I fell thirteen feet when a ladder broke, severely injuring my back and causing a lifetime of challenges. I was eighteen at the time and had been an avid golfer. A 4-handicap, I broke par three days in a row for the first time, and then a week later I broke my back. I wanted to play again - badly - but each return to the game stopped as the back deteriorated.

After the accident I took up T'ai Chi and it helped a lot. I learned to twist or to bend - but I could not do both.

I was watching an LPGA tournament and a very young and very tiny pro used a long driver, standing up virtually straight, and won the tournament. I wondered if we could make a golf club long enough for me where I could swing without bending.

We could, we did, and launched me on a path of discovery through circus giants, family stories, inspirational humanity, the inner workings of the USGA and Royal and Ancient, and the joy of stealing a few extra years of playing this great game.

Same length clubs have become popular now due to the success of U.S. Amateur and NCAA champion Bryson DeChambeau. Not all the clubs in his bag are the same length. Irons and woods are different lengths. In my case, because I couldn't bend and have relatively short arms, all my clubs, from woods to wedges, are all the same length - 51.5 inches. These are some of the extra-long, all the same length clubs Callaway and Cobra made for me between 1997 and 2005 next to the standard length clubs:

Background Info

I broke my back in the late 70's. I was 18 at the time and had just started breaking par. I spent many years trying to find a way to play again, and in the early 90's Callaway made me a set of clubs all 51.5 inches so I could swing without bending. I got about ten more good years of golf before the back deteriorated and I'm not playing now - only chipping a few balls now and then. I designed a all-terrain Walker/Chair to allow me to maybe play a few holes.

The USGA passed a rule in the early 2000's limiting all clubs except putters to 48 inches. In corresponding with the USGA and their historian, Rand Jerris, and to the best of their knowledge, I had the longest set in the world, and the only set in the world made illegal by the new rule. However, Rand also mentioned a set of clubs given in the USGA Museum that belonged to a circus giant in the 1920's.

This is where the adventure begins.

After much Googleing, Newspaper Archiving, USGA records searching, and some luck, the story of Jack Earle - sideshow freak, golfer, poet, painter, sculptor, inventor, storyteller, silent film star, traveling salesman, musician, and friend of crippled children. Jack the Giant's best friends were the munchkins in Wizard of Oz. His clubs weren't actually that long by modern standards (in fact his driver was 50 inches and his putter was only 30), but they were made in 1924 using hickory shafts and very early versions of metal shafts. In fact his steel shafted-clubs were made the first year steel shafts were allowed by the USGA (and 3 years after the Western

Golf Association). Jack was 8 feet 7 inches tall. It is likely but undocumented that he knew Leo Diegel through a mutual acquaintance in Tucson. Leo Diegel was also a contemporary of the "Seven Golfing Turnesa Brothers" who are connected to this story through a son, Joe jr., who was on the road for Titleist for many decades and whose bad back and short arms required him to make an extremely long golf club set in the 19560's. Another fun coincidence is that Jack Earle's cousins were close friends of my grandfather, and through all this I learned some heartbreaking facts about my own father.

Then, through contacts in the Sideshow world I'd made researching Jack, I found Gil. Gil Reichert was also a sideshow giant, 8 feet 4 inches. There is very little in the public record regarding him compared to the rest of us. A couple of small-town newspaper articles describe his clubs as 12 inches over standard - and they were stolen at least once. Gil was also on the House of David basketball team. All the House of David teams featured players who wore very long beards. Babe Zaharias later pitched for the House of David baseball team - she didn't have to wear the beard. If the newspaper accounts are accurate then some of Gil's clubs are longer than mine and some shorter.

The last member of this unusual foursome is Joe Turnesa jr. who hurt his back working for Titleist in the early 60's and made a set that was all 9 to 16 inches over standard. Joe was with Acushnet his entire career. When I spoke to him in 2000 I was playing at Kapalua and he was managing tour support for Footjoy. When I started doing research to find out about Joe's clubs I first Googled him and discovered the Turnesa family. Starting over 100 years ago with the Italian immigrant orphan Vitale who, desperately needing work, and in a place that his sainted wife could be healthier, found a job shoveling dirt for a golf course being built in Elmsford, NY. Six of his seven sons became professionals - Joe Sr. played on the first two Ryder Cups and won 15 PGA events. Brother Jim won the PGA. Brother Wil stayed an amateur but won both the U.S. and British Amateur and captained the Walker Cup Team in 1947. The Turnesa Brothers still hold the record for most brothers to win PGA events (4 brothers, 24 events). Vitale became the first of now four generations professionally involved with golf who have been a part of the fabric of almost every great golfing event in the history of American Golf. In 2008 Marc Turnesa win the PGA event at Las Vegas -almost exactly 100 years since his grandfather made that fateful walk from New York.

This is a story of inventing your way around problems. This is a story of the 20th century viewed through a prism of the fringe of physicality. This is a story of the generosity, both personal and corporate, unique to the golf range and the club designer. As I mentioned, I am not a professional writer, but I have been a professional researcher, and I've done a lot of research in connection with these stories.

Dear Bob,

Many thanks for sharing all of your research with us. This is terrific information to add to our files, to help enhance our understanding of the clubs and of Jack Earle. The amount of information you've found is impressive, and tells a good story.

We do have occasion to see Mr. Trevino at the Senior Open from time to time, and if I get a chance to see him this summer I'll be sure to ask.

Best,

Rand

-----Original Message-----

From: Bob Danziger Sent: Wednesday, January 05, 2005 9:12 PM

To: Rand Jerris

Cc: Carter Rich

Subject: Fw: Research Notes

Dear Rand - I have completed a pretty extensive look at the life of Jack Earle. The summary results are set out below. I will be happy to send you all of the scans of the original documents, notes, pictures, etc. The files pretty big so you may need it by disk. I will try to send the full file in a seperate email so you have a good provenance on the clubs in your collection.

The only thing I would recommend you do in addition to my work is to see if you can interview Lee Trevino on his role in donating the clubs and his relationship with Myer Erlich. I have no

way of getting to him but you may.

I must say that Jack Earle is an excellent example for all of us who invent our way around problems to do the things we want to do and have to do. I can't think of a better person to carry the message for those of us who have made special clubs to steal a few more years of playing golf.

Bob Danziger