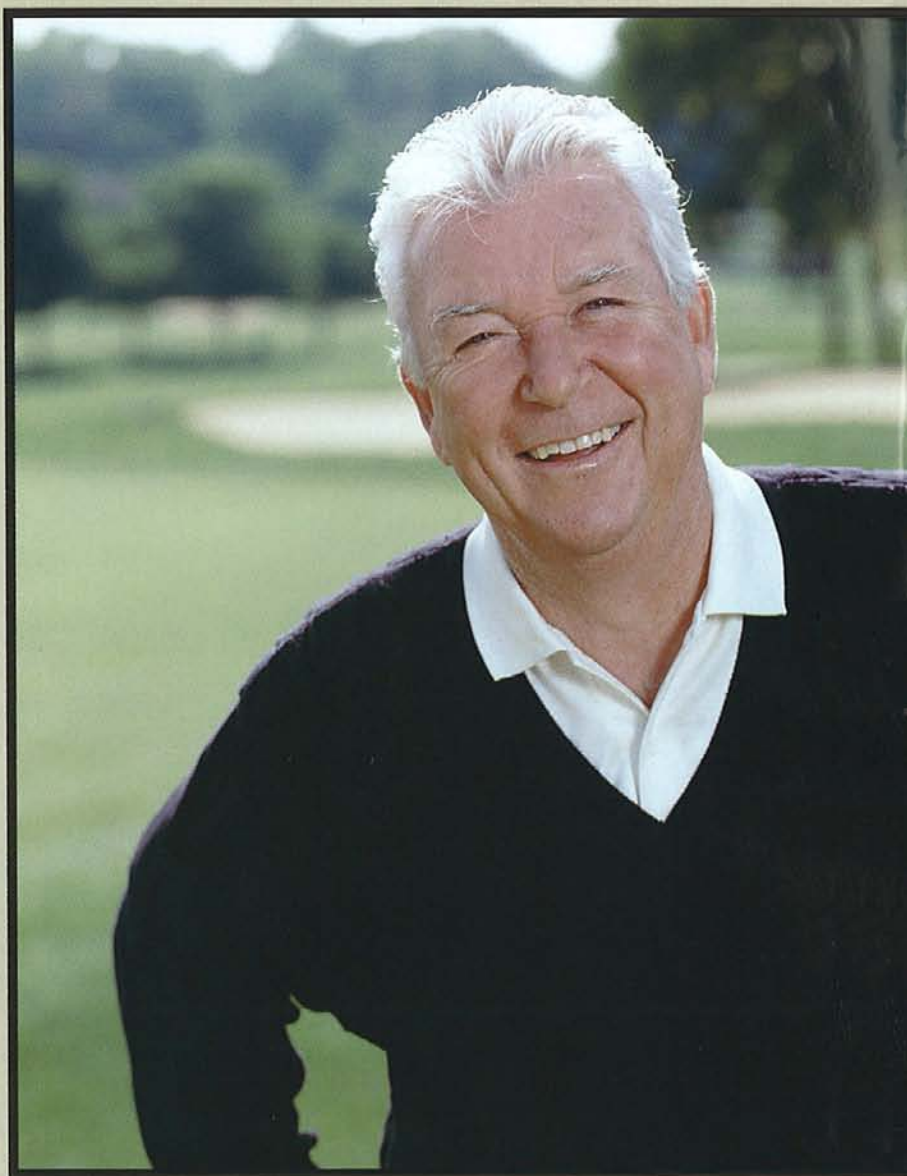


by David Maraghy

What a great assignment! Spend the day with golf legend Ken Venturi as he shoots a commercial for Orlimar Golf. I knew any article on Venturi would deal with his inspiring victory at the 1964 U.S. Open, when he battled through the 36-hole final day fighting life-threatening heat exhaustion. And even the most casual golf fan knows of his outstanding 30-year CBS TV career as one of the most respected golf commentators in the industry.

While I had been around Ken before, I had never had the opportunity to speak extensively with him. I wondered what he would be like.

As I join the group at Starmount Forest Country Club in Greensboro, N.C., an onlooker remarks about how tall and slim Venturi is compared to his television appearance. He gleefully tells the story of the woman who meets him in person and blurts: "You look better *alive* than you do on television!" Somehow that makes sense,



Ken Venturi

especially when you experience his intensity. When Venturi speaks to you, his eyes hone in as if you were the pin on the first playoff hole.

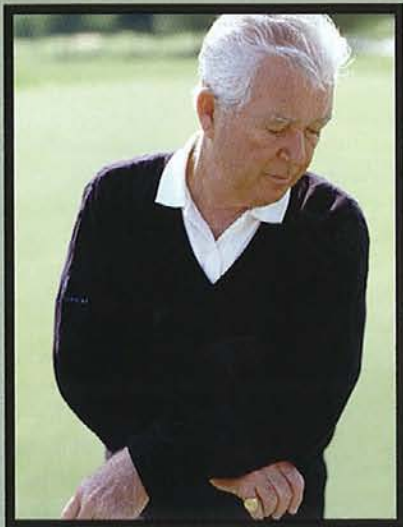
Especially in situations involving long days before the camera, celebrities often define prima donna, acting boorish, at best, to admirers. Not Venturi. While professionally attentive to his duties of the

day, he interacts and jokes with club members as if he were part of their Saturday morning golf group. He sincerely compliments them on their beautiful course, which bears little resemblance to the sparse track he found in the 1950s when he played this Greater Greensboro Open stop on the Tour.

The members certainly take advantage

of the opportunity to interact. Questions fly: "Remember when..."—"What was Hogan like?"—"Is it true...?" Not only does Venturi answer all inquiries, he seems to have a delightful story applicable to each. For any golfer, time spent around Ken is like walking through golf history.

A member's comment reminds Ken of a match pairing him with Harvey Ward



against Ben Hogan and Byron Nelson at Cypress Point. It was the early part of the week during one of the Bing Crosby tournaments. Venturi and Ward were amateurs. Crosby's gathering dared legendary pros Hogan and Nelson to square off against the two youngsters. The resulting golf was suitable for a fantasy movie script. In that match, Hogan shot 63, Ward posted 65, and both Nelson and Venturi scored 67. Hogan actually won the match on 18 as, winking at Venturi, he dropped a 15-foot putt for birdie, securing a one-up victory.

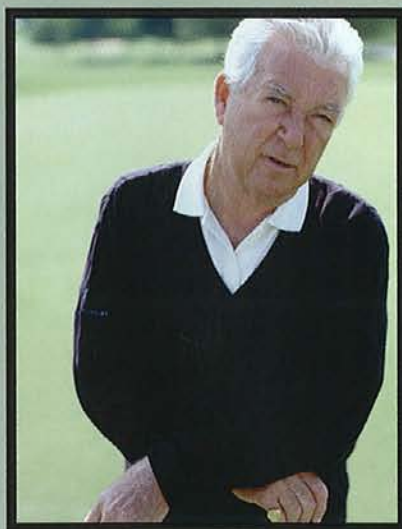
Cypress Point is a favorite for Venturi. He played much of his junior golf there, and never forgot the kindness shown him. After winning the Open, he returned one day and summoned all the caddies to assemble. Some felt that "The Kid" was home, perhaps, to gloat. Instead, he delivered generous portions of fried chicken to repay all the club meals he'd been given during his family's lean years. With special glee and a twinkle in his eye, Venturi delights in telling us about the beverage for that impromptu feast: an ice-filled cooler full of Dom Perignon!

Listening to Ken regaling everyone with wonderful stories and then observing his polished performance during taping, I find it practically impossible to believe that this television star stammered so badly that he could not even say his own name until he was 13. He says that he always knew he would win an Open, but never dreamed he would be able to speak. He picked the loneliest sport he could find, and discovered that the process of hitting balls helped him teach himself to speak. He tells us that he unwittingly employed

devices that teachers use now...that he learned on his own that the ears and the hands are related.

While Venturi never makes the connection, I cannot help but wonder if his excellent work on behalf of several charities is not somehow related to this early personal challenge. I had no idea from my research that he was so active with Guiding Eyes for the Blind and Camp Venture for retarded children. Only when I inquire specifically about those groups do I learn that he personally has helped raise enough money to provide 300 Seeing Eye dogs to deserving recipients at a price of \$20,000 per dog.

Venturi speaks often of his good fortune in learning the game directly through Byron Nelson's instruction and, vicariously, from playing with Ben Hogan. He compares the experience to "being taught by Michelangelo and being shown by



DaVinci." And a third man receives credit from Venturi for his success, not just in golf, but in life: his father.

Ken refers to several well-documented instances when his father, a salesman for a ship chandler, provided lasting guidance. He was fond of quotes, and the younger Venturi often heard a favorite: "Excuses are the crutches for the untalented." During an amateur slump, Ken informed his dad that he was going to quit. The response: "Son, that's quite all right. But you know something? That's the only thing I know of in this world that doesn't take talent. Anybody can do that." Spurred on by that thought, Ven-

13 degree

**Strong
three.**



Par 5s in two.

Ken Venturi

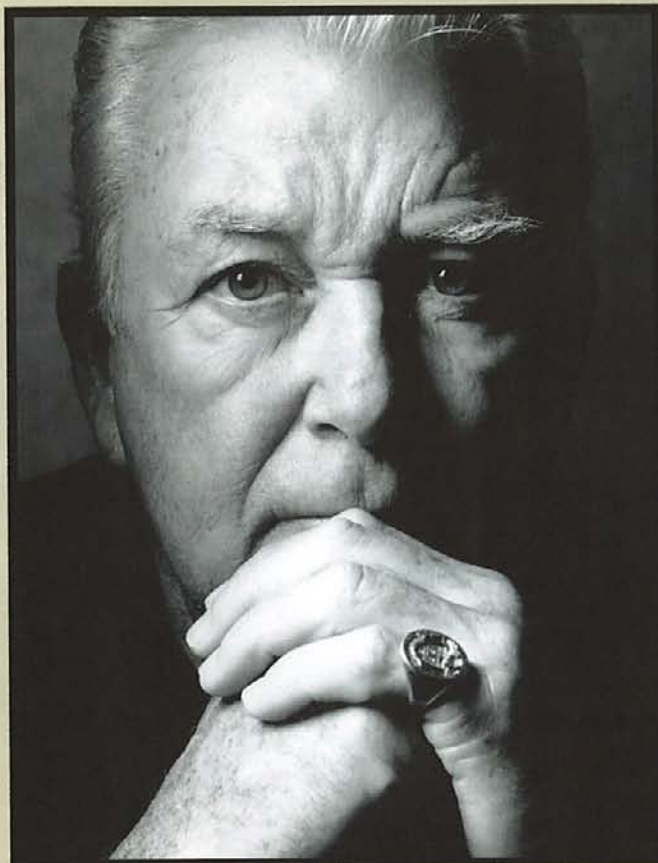
turi played well, winning several amateur tournaments, and telling his father how good he was. "Son," said his dad, "if you're as good as you say you are, you can tell anybody, but when you get really good, they'll tell you." Since then, Venturi has let others talk about his game.

Indeed, when Venturi reflects on the state of the professional game today, he offers no excuses for his role as commentator rather than Senior Tour regular. At age 33, carpal tunnel syndrome forced him to retire from the Tour, and today his hands and wrists are wracked by scarring that would appear to be a barrier to his playing competitively. His game, however, is up to the challenge. An ill-conceived rule denies his automatic qualification for the Senior Tour based upon insufficient career earnings. He is bothered by golf's modern-day emphasis on money as opposed to excellence, especially considering that his 14 Tour victories include an event deemed by some sports media as the most dramatic victory in golf history.

But Venturi's tone is not bitter. Rather, he asserts with conviction that, given the choice of playing for millions of dollars without a victory or winning tournaments, he would always opt for the latter. "You can spend the money," he says, "but you can never spend the memories."

Venturi does offer that one of his biggest career disappointments is not having been Captain of the Ryder Cup Team. In 1965 the position was offered to him, but he felt he would have the opportunity to captain again and so opted to play instead. That is how his mentor, Byron Nel-

son, was named Captain of that 1965 team. He believes two factors now dictate that captains be older veterans: the task has grown too demanding, and it is impossible to serve as supporter and adviser to players whom you are trying to beat the



"Son," said his dad, "if you're as good as you say you are, you can tell anybody, but when you get really good, they'll tell you."

other 51 weeks of the year.

One thing that clearly does not disappoint Ken is his relationship with Orlimar Golf Company and its revolutionary TriMetal™. He knows the Orlimar family very well, as they hail from his San Francisco Bay area home and have been building quality golf clubs for 38 years. In fact, it is fitting that two other spokesmen for the Orlimar TriMetal™ are Roger Maltbie and Mark Lye. Both players attended San Jose State, Venturi's alma mater, on a scholarship named after him.

Venturi discusses the TriMetal™ with the same honest enthusiasm he has displayed throughout the day. He offers a golf truism from Nelson: always trust your eye. "Nelson would say that if the pin is right, hit a fade; if the pin is tucked left, draw; if the pin is back, hit it low; if the pin is up front, hit it high; and if in doubt, just hit it straight!" While we all laugh, Venturi declares that Nelson could hit the ball straighter than anyone he ever knew.

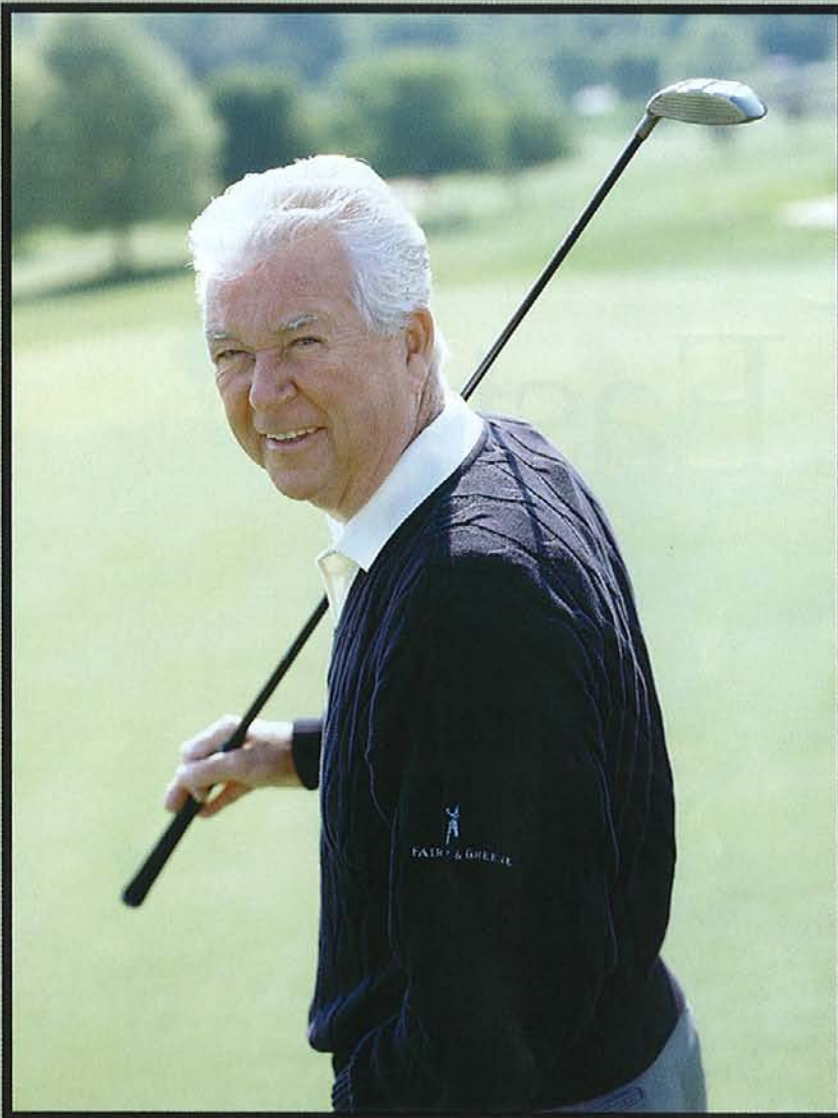
Venturi raves after each shot he hits from the fairway as balls invariably pepper the flag over 200 yards away. He quotes Hogan: "There are two ways of testing a club: machines and me. And I trust me!"

"This is the club for any player," he volunteers. "Anyone can benefit from using this club. What is the average player looking for? Length, accuracy and to get the ball in the air. This club will do that, and that improves any game."

Using my best fledgling reporter imitation, I side up to Ken and inquire about his enthusiasm for the TriMetal™. "It's easy when you believe in the product," he responds loudly. "This is the last club in my bag. No more deals. This is it. This is the U.S. Open!" ▲

David Maraghy is the President and CEO of Sports Management International, L.C. He organizes and operates golf tournaments around the world, and has provided the driving force behind such events as the 1995 Hyundai Motor Golf Classic and the AMF Signet Open. David served as General Chairman of the 1986 Greater Greensboro Open, a PGA Tour event which set a record for charitable contributions.

Look for Dave's profile of Kiawah Island, "Pebble Beach East," starting on Page 8.



1964 *Sports Illustrated's* Sportsman of the Year
PGA Player of the Year

1965 Ryder Cup Team Member

1978 Inducted into Collegiate Hall of Fame

1979 Inducted into Smithsonian Institution

1994 Golden Tee Award by the Metropolitan
Golf Writers

1998 Old Tom Morris Award from the Golf
Course Superintendents' Association

15
degree

**Strong
four.**



**Solid from
any lie.**