

The GOLFCChicago Interview

Journalism is a tough field. If you're fortunate enough to "make it" in the industry that means you've accomplished a great deal, you've weathered the storm of being told what to write and how to write it. If you have made it in journalism, then chances are you've gone down some roads less traveled and taken your licks, because there are droves upon droves of people just as hungry as you to make a name in the industry. It's safe to say that you've gone above and beyond "making it" if you're a staple for ESPN, former columnist for the *Washington Post*, Tweet to two million followers, and are generally one of the most respected sports journalists in the world.

Michael Wilbon is all of these things, and he's a Chicago guy. As humble and grateful of a person as you'll ever meet. A South Side native, he graduated from St. Ignatius College Prep in 1976, received a degree in journalism from Northwestern University in 1980, and supports his city unconditionally. Although he resides in Maryland, Wilbon always refers to Chicago as home. A co-host of "Pardon the Interruption," he can be seen every weekday debating the hottest sports topics with Tony Kornheiser, in addition to being heard weekly on ESPN 1000 AM here in town. To top it all off, Michael Wilbon is an avid golfer and he appreciates the game. GOLFCChicago had the pleasure of speaking with him to discuss his love for this crazy game we play.

Michael Wilbon's Love of the Game

by Todd Mrowice



GOLFCChicago: How long have you been playing and how did you learn the game?

Michael Wilbon: My first lesson was on May 18th in 1997. It was the day before I got married. I took a lesson from a really interesting young professional in Fairfax, Virginia. That's how I learned the game. I grew up on the South Side of Chicago, where golf wasn't an option. It wasn't even on the radar. I never owned a golf club growing up and there wasn't a way for me to take up the game. I played sandlot games like baseball and basketball.

GC: Was there a particular person that was influential in you learning the game?

MW: Yeah, Tiger Woods. I was a columnist at the *Washington Post* and I had to cover Tiger because he was the biggest thing in sports. I felt that I couldn't do my

job without knowing more about the game, because if you don't play how can you be connected to it? Tiger really influenced me to observe the game properly. He influenced a ton of people for that matter. Now, did I know that I would become a fanatic? No. I thought that I'd be a nine-hole player here and there. Boy, was I wrong.

GC: What your handicap?

MW: I think I'm about a 12.5, somewhere in there. The best I've ever been in my life is a 10. It's funny because my son, Matthew, is eight years old and he's starting to swing a club. So our handicaps are going in opposite directions, mine is going up and his is going down. He's definitely a child of golf.

GC: You're a Chicago guy. What are your favorite memories when you think of "Chicago golf"?

MW: My memories are all new, because golf is still something relatively new to me. For a long time though the first time I broke 80 was at Cantigny. I shot a 79 with my brother, for some reason I had the day off from PTI. Most of my friends though came to the golf game late. So I'm still experiencing a lot.

GC: *You're a member at Olympia Fields. What made you decide to join there with so many country clubs in Chicagoland?*

MW: A lot of reasons. Mainly, I love the place. The two courses they have are fantastic. I mean, the North Course hosted a U.S. Open, come on how great is that? I'm a South Side guy so the location is a big deal to me. My uncle actually lives out there as well. It was after I joined though that I realized it was one of the best decisions I've ever made. I'm also a member at Columbia Country Club in Maryland and Scottsdale National in Arizona.

GC: *Where else do you play when you're in Chicago?*

MW: Every year I play in the golf outing for St. Ignatius, which is at Cog Hill. I love Dubsdread. I probably have more rounds at the Glen Club than anywhere else because my brother is a member there. I've been lucky enough to play Medinah; I actually played it the day after the 1999 PGA Championship when Tiger battled Sergio. I love making the drive up to Kohler when I can as well. Too many good courses in one area.

GC: *Your position as a national journalist has allowed you to meet many people. Any golf partners that have been your favorites?*

MW: I've been very fortunate. I played in Michael Jordan's tournament a lot ... great experience. I've had the opportunity to golf with people like Jerome Bettis, Jermaine Dye, Otis Wilson, Richard Dent, and many others. Brian Urlacher is also a member at Scottsdale National and we played together in the American

Century Championship in Tahoe.

GC: *In your opinion, what can be done to grow the game of golf?*

MW: Be more inclusive. The game needs programs that involve husbands, wives, and their children. There's no reason why everyone in the family can't play. Golf has to be more accessible. Also, the more people that play the game from different places in life, the better. You don't have to look like everyone else that plays the game. Tiger proved that, but now there's a whole new generation that should have access to a golf course. Make the game affordable and make it accessible and those people will understand how great the game is.

GC: *Hypothetical question. You have a private jet that will take you to any golf course in the world, at anytime you want, for free, and for the rest of your life. Or, the Cubs win the 2016 World Series. Which one?*

MW: (Without hesitation) Cubs. It's not even close. My mother is 90 years old and she sits in front of her television for every single game. So as much as I want it, I think about her. Tell you what, I'll take it a step further. I'll pass on that offer for another Super Bowl for the Bears as well. I'd even pass on it for a championship at Northwestern. Now, I've been extremely fortunate and have had the chance to play Pebble Beach. I haven't been to St. Andrews, but I'll get there. Augusta would be a big one for me, but no. I'll take a Cubs World Series win.

It's not surprising to see the passion that Michael Wilbon brings to the game of golf. It doesn't seem to be far off from the conviction he speaks with on PTI or the "no qualms" approach he takes to calling Chicago his city, even with the spotlight of a national audience upon him. It's a big part of the reason we're happy to call him "one of ours."





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