

Dominating the Links

BY TROY WATKINS



At the 2004 Massachusetts Amateur Tournament

Frank Vana Jr. '86 is the most prolific amateur golfer in Massachusetts' history . . . and he's still going.

According to a November 2006 MGA press release, "With each passing year, Frank Vana Jr. reaffirms his status as the most dominating amateur golfer in Massachusetts since the days of Francis Ouimet and Frederick Wright. . . . Vana, the 1990s MGA Player of the Decade, continues to strengthen his case for another such award. . . . In addition to his record eight MGA Player of the Year awards, Vana is the most prolific amateur golfer this state has ever seen as he has captured 12 MGA Championships over the course of his career. The closest players to Vana in that category are Jim Ruschioni (10), Wright (9) and Ouimet (7)."

Unlike the most dominant professional golfer, Frank hasn't been playing since he was old enough to hit a golf ball. His parents owned a driving range in Sudbury, MA, and they expected Frank and his siblings to help them run the business. "We shagged a lot more golf balls than we

had a chance to hit," Frank recalled. "As a kid, I preferred to play football and hockey. It wasn't until eighth grade when I began to take to golf. Growing up on a driving range certainly helped introduce me to the game at an early age and provided me with the opportunity to learn the basic skills."

Frank played football, hockey, and golf at Marian High School (Framingham) and Williston Academy (Easthampton). He played hockey and golf at West Point, where he spent his first two years of college, before transferring to Assumption. Frank explained, "Assumption was a great fit for me because I was looking for a strong academic school that also offered hockey and golf. I interviewed with Tom Dunn and met with Andy Laska. After spending time with them, I immediately knew that Assumption College was the place for me."

Though shorter than most, Frank's college experience was memorable. "During

HIS RIVALS MAY ARGUE THAT eight-time Massachusetts Golf Association (MGA) Player of the Year **Frank Vana Jr. '86** had an unfair advantage—he grew up on a driving range. However, they have to concede that they might be playing against the best amateur golfer in the history of the Commonwealth.

my two years at Assumption, I can't remember a professor whom I didn't like," he said. "I especially remember the professors were available for help if I needed it. As a smaller college, it also made it easier for me to make friends, many of whom have become my best friends over the years."

Frank was a rare breed as a Greyhound athlete—he played three sports. He tallied 25 goals (third best all-time) and 17 assists as a center for the hockey team, recorded 60 tackles as a linebacker for the football team, and owned the low average for the fall and spring golf seasons, becoming one of only two Assumption golfers to advance to the NCAA Division 2 individual tournament. Frank was inducted to the Alumni-Athletic Hall of Fame in 1996.

As an economics major with a minor in finance, Frank was able to get into the financial services field right out of college. "Assumption College prepared me well, providing me with a solid base of knowledge and strong work ethic," he said. Frank was hired by the Worcester office of New England Life Insurance right after graduating and worked there until 1998. Through business associates, he was introduced to American Stop Loss Insurance and transitioned to the self-funded health insurance industry where he was responsible for servicing and selling accounts nationwide. He recently left American and began a new business venture with fellow alumnus **R.J. Foley '83** (owner of Foley Motorsports in Shrewsbury). Together they opened First Choice Remarketing, an automotive fleet remarketing company with offices in Shrewsbury and Agoura Hills, CA.

For several years, Frank has served on the planning committee of Assumption's Father Bissonnette Invitational Golf Tournament. He has also provided instruction to Tournament's participants at the driving range prior to tee time.

THOUGH A CONSTANT CHALLENGE, FRANK HAS learned how to balance his work with his golf commitments. He explained, "It's funny because people always assume that I play golf all of the time. In reality, I compete in local and national tournaments during the summer months and am able to practice about 30 to 60 minutes on the off days. The majority of my practice time is spent either on my short game or at the driving range at Cyprian Keyes Golf Club, which is only two miles from my house."

With work, family, and golf to attend to, he does not have much time for leisurely play. "To be competitive you need to practice and hone your skills, which can't always be achieved on the course. It's also difficult to balance golf with work and family. There has to be a healthy balance. I'm truly fortunate that my wife, Becky, understands what it takes to compete at this level and quite often encourages me to practice and/or play in certain national events. Without family support and teamwork it would be impossible for me to compete like I do."

The Vanas are a unique golfing family. Frank has competed in and won tournaments with each of his parents, and all four of his younger sisters learned to play as well. Frank Sr. caddied for Frank Jr. for several years, but has since retired. "My parents still follow me around to my events," he beamed. "They've been a wonderful support system for me over the years."

Frank truly appreciates what he has been able to do and the path his life has taken. "Like many, I dreamt about becoming a

professional golfer, but the possibility of making it is very slim," he admitted. "I made the decision a long time ago that I wanted to enjoy golf and make it a part of my life, but I also want to spend time with my family and see my daughter, Erin, and son, Jake, grow up." Erin is a sophomore at Ipswich High School and plays both basketball and lacrosse. Jake will turn two in November.

What's in store for his golfing future? "People keep asking me now if I want to play on the Senior Tour. I always tell them that it sounds great, but I love the life that I have carved out for myself



After winning his 7th Massachusetts Mid-Am in 2006

VANA'S "A" GAME

- ◆ 8-time Massachusetts Golf Association Amateur Player of the Year (1994, 1995, 2001–06)
- ◆ Massachusetts Amateur Player of the Decade (1990–99)
- ◆ 2-time Massachusetts Amateur champion (2004, '05)
- ◆ 7-time Massachusetts Mid-Amateur champion (1999–2003, '05, '06)
- ◆ 4-time Francis Ouimet Invitational champion (1998, 2001, '02, '06)
- ◆ Twice low amateur in Massachusetts Open (2002, '04)
- ◆ Twice low amateur in New England Open (2002, '04)
- ◆ 4-time Tarlow Invitational champion (1999, 2002, '04, '06)
- ◆ 5-time Worcester County Amateur champion (1995, '97–99, 2006)
- ◆ 26 United States Golf Association (USGA) events:
 - 6-time Massachusetts state team member (1995, '97, '99, 2001, '03, '05)
 - 10-time U.S. Amateur qualifier (1993, '95, '96, '99, 2001–06)
 - 10-time U.S. Mid-Amateur qualifier (1994–98, 2000, '01, 2003–05)

because it includes my family, friends, and the game that I love to play. The Senior PGA has changed the qualifying rules to make it almost impossible for a non-PGA Tour player to compete. I still have five years before I turn 50 and I'm certainly not interested in rushing that!"

So keep your eyes turned toward the tournament leaderboards, as Frank Vana Jr. continues to rewrite the Massachusetts amateur golf record books. ❖