

Oregon's Got Game: Golf

Oregon-born Dave Manougian, President of The Golf Channel, and Arnold Palmer talk the business and the game of golf

By Jim Pasero

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Dave Manougian is a graduate of Portland's Cleveland High School. His father, Sarkis Manougian, worked at Atiyeh Brothers Rug & Carpet for 40 years. Today, Dave Manougian gets up and goes to work on the other side of the country in Orlando, Florida—that's because Oregon-born Manougian became president of The Golf Channel in January '02.

That's the same golf channel now viewed in 58 million homes in North America, the same golf channel that next year will be the exclusive network of the PGA's Champions Tour, as well as being the exclusive provider for the European Tour, and the same channel that last year hired on-air talent Vince Cellini away from CNN. Local boy makes good, very good, at golf.

Oh, by the way, the 42-year old Manougian also happens to be close friends with Arnold Palmer—the founder of The Golf Channel. Late last winter Portland resident Steve Brink, a childhood friend of Manougian's, came to Orlando (Orlando is also the home of Tiger Woods, Annika Sorenstam, Ernie Ells, Mark O'Meara, and Scott Hoch) to get a glimpse of the local lifestyle. Manougian remembers:

“Steve was out here on vacation and I made a tee time at Bay Hill (Arnold's course) for a twosome on Sunday. They joined us with Charles Howell III, who had just recently lost the Nissan L.A. Open in a playoff. It was a neat deal, and Arnold found out we were playing and drove out and watched us play a few holes.” An afternoon with Palmer and a rising PGA star—not a bad way to host a childhood friend.

No wonder Manougian says, “I have a great job.”

When Dave Manougian isn't entertaining friends from home, he is busy overseeing the growth of The Golf Channel. “When I started at the Golf Channel in '94, as vice president for ad sales, I was the 14th employee hired. We now have 325 employees, and we're adding six to eight million homes a year.” And while his viewers may see only a game, the game of golf, Manougian's workday is anything but. “I work 12 hour days, and spend a portion of my day going over items that have to do with the product, the brand, programming, marketing and general operations and where we want to be a year or two from now.”

Another Oregon resident, John Norville, a Hollywood screenwriter and co-writer with Ron Shelton of the classic golf movie, *Tin Cup*, has noticed the rapid growth and success of The Golf Channel.

“The Golf Channel is the background music of choice in my house,” says Norville. “It's a wonderful station to randomly turn on. The teaching is helpful and the historical stuff is a hoot. It's fun to see Nicklaus playing Gary Player. It's the only place you can see Pine

Valley on TV because they once allowed a ‘Shell’s Wonderful World of Golf.’ And it’s fun to see guys putt on greens when the stemp meter was 3.” Norville has some personal interest in watching the rise of Manougian and The Golf Channel because he too is a Cleveland High graduate and grew up in the same Eastmoreland neighborhood with Manougian. “We played a lot of street basketball together as kids. He grew up on 35th and I grew up on 29th. The games were very, very hard fought street games and Dave had a good jump shot. You had to deny him that. On the golf course he’s pretty adept at getting the ball up and down. He’s a good putter.”

And yet another Oregon resident is a rising star on The Golf Channel and happens to have two shows on the network—Peter Jacobsen. Jacobsen stars in “Plugged In,” a lighthearted instructional show, and “Peter and Friends,” a golf roundtable discussion show.

Says Manougian of Jacobsen’s on-air work, “Peter is very comfortable in front of the camera and has a glib and relaxed manner in relating to other golfers. It’s a great environment to showcase his personality, and one of the two shows will air every Monday night, with 12 to 14 episodes being the roundtable and and 10 to 12 being “Plugged In.” One of Manougian’s favorite shows was a “Peter and Friends” with Jacobsen, Nancy Lopez and Michelle McGann discussing the ups and downs of Annika Sorenstam competing against the men at this year’s Colonial Open. “That show got interest,” says Manougian.

Ask Manougian about the direction of golf course architecture, and you’ll get some strong opinions—and they lead back home. “The industry needs to be focused that we built the right courses. Golfers want to enjoy themselves, not feel exhausted because they’ve been playing target golf. The wonderful thing about growing up in Oregon was playing such great public courses like Eastmoreland, Broadmoor, Rose City and Heron Lakes. How lucky we were to have those types of courses.”

No matter how busy he is with the year-round business of The Golf Channel, Dave Manougian does take the time to get back to his old hometown. “Yes, being a Portland native, I get back three times a year, for the holidays, for the summers.” And when he’s home is he playing golf? “I usually play.” Where? “At Columbia Edgewater, that’s where my brother, Ron, belongs.”

And the family matches are as intense as the childhood basketball games in the old Eastmoreland neighborhood.