10-5-16 County Judge's Article

ARNIE REMEMBERED

I'm going to take advantage of you this week, depart from my usual practice of sticking to business and just get down right sentimental .

One of my most favorite people in the world died this past week. That would be Arnold Palmer and I can't help but pay tribute like so many others have been doing these past few days. I know I'm not a celebrity like most of those who are singing his praises, and I'm just a duffer when it comes to golf; but Arnie was one of those celebrities who appealed to ordinary folks like me.

He and Yogi Berra were heroes of mine as well as role models beginning away back when I was a kid and lasting throughout my lifetime. They were just ordinary guys made good but they stayed ordinary guys even when they became famous. They were unorthodox in their styles as athletes with very magnetic personalities that appealed to a broad and diverse segment of the public.

They were not just great athletes but were great examples of humility, integrity, respect for others, leadership, business moxie, and a lot of other admirable qualities that I always wished I could do better at in my own life.

Here's some excerpts from a short blurb that I wrote away back around 1980 after seeing him for the first time at the Houston Open that sort of describes what I'm trying to say about Arnold Palmer. I know it sounds corny now but I was just as sentimental 30 some odd years ago as I am today:

"He came stalking up the fairway to the green, gray hair shining in the sun, but belly flat like a kid of twenty-one. This was my first look at him. I remember first hearing the name Arnold Palmer when I was maybe ten or eleven."

"He gestured and smiled to the crowd at the green as his 'army' came stringing along the walkway, hurrying to keep up with his brisk pace and to get a glimpse of his putt. This was pro-am day before the tourney began, and he was putting last after the three businessmen he was teamed with. (They putted out, then) Arnie's jaw jutted as he concentrated, looking over the situation; his 30 foot birdie putt ran past the hole a few inches and he tapped in for a par. We all applauded remembering those famous charges when he would have dropped it in for the 'bird'.

"Mr. Palmer, can I have your autograph," called a young boy clamoring to get up to him through the crowd. Another fan in his 40's, probably a business man, held out a program which Palmer graciously signed as he passed through to the next tee. I felt around in my pocket for something for him to sign thinking, "I've never asked anyone for an autograph in all my 38 years," feeling a little embarrassed. "Oh, isn't he beautiful," a well heeled lady fluttered to her teenage daughter next to me.

"On the next tee, Palmer grabbed his driver and with boyish enthusiasm, displaying that lunging sort of swing of his knocked his next drive far out and with just enough draw to get a good run down the fairway when it hit the ground."

“I always wondered whether any human deserved to be called a legend,” I mused to myself as he strode away down the fairway. Now I knew!”