

1-1-2004

Robert Lee Elder

Stephen Lowe

Olivet Nazarene University, slowe@olivet.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.olivet.edu/hist_facp



Part of the [American Popular Culture Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lowe, Stephen, "Robert Lee Elder" (2004). *Faculty Scholarship - History*. Paper 9.
http://digitalcommons.olivet.edu/hist_facp/9

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the History at Digital Commons @ Olivet. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Scholarship - History by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Olivet. For more information, please contact kboyens@olivet.edu.

Elder, Robert Lee. (14 July 1934, Dallas, Texas–). Elder's father (Charles) was a coal truck driver and his mother (Sadie) was a housewife. Elder spent his professional life in golf, first as a caddie and after 1959 as successful tour player.

By the mid-1960s, Elder mastered the United Golf Association's black circuit. In 1967 he won eighteen UGA events in twenty-two tries. Later that year, Elder joined the Professional Golf Association Tour. He gained national prominence when he lost to Jack Nicklaus in a play-off at the 1968 American Golf Classic. Elder took a while to win on the PGA Tour, but in 1974 he captured the Monsanto Open. That accomplishment made him eligible for The Masters, and in April 1975 Elder became the first African American to compete in the Augusta National Golf Club's prestigious tournament. In 1976 he won the Houston Open, and in 1978 he added victories at the Greater Milwaukee Open and the Westchester Classic. Elder's 1978 performance earned him a spot on the 1979 U.S. Ryder Cup team. He left the PGA Tour in 1984 to join the Senior PGA Tour, where he once captured eight tournaments in four years. In 1990 Elder considerably reduced his competitive schedule.

Lee Elder will always be remembered most for his 1975 Masters performance, but his entire career—including regular PGA Tour winnings of more than \$1,000,000 and Senior Tour winnings of some \$2,500,000—is a testament to the collapse of many racial barriers in professional tour golf in the late 1960s.

Bibliography: Kennedy, John H. *A Course of Their Own: A History of African American Golfers*. Kansas City, MO: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2000; McDaniel, Pete. *Uneven Lies: The Heroic Story of African Americans in Golf*. Greenwich, CT: The American Golfer, 2000; Sinnette, Calvin. *Forbidden Fairways: African Americans and the Game of Golf*. Chelsea, MI: Sleeping Bear Press, 1998.

Stephen R. Lowe