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Howard "Butch" Wheeler

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Wheeler, Howard “Butch.” (8 April 1911, Atlanta, Georgia–25 April 1968, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania). Having completed just elementary school, Wheeler entered the world of golf as a caddie in Atlanta. He carried clubs for Robert Tyre “Bobby” Jones at Brookhaven Country Club and eventually rose to caddie master at the East Lake Golf Club before joining the black professional circuit as a touring professional.

Wheeler possessed a tall, lean frame and skillfully used it to become one of the longest hitters of the golf ball ever. He claimed his first tournament victory in the 1931 Atlanta Open. Two years later, Wheeler won his first United Golf Association national championship. Throughout his long career, Wheeler added five more UGA national titles; he won for the second time in 1938, then captured three in a row from 1946-1948, and finally won again in 1958. In the midst of those national title victories, Wheeler also collected his share of minor events, such as the 1951 Joe Louis Invitational. Wheeler’s career peaked in the late 1940s, when he rivaled Ted Rhodes as the country’s top African American golfer. Unlike Ted Rhodes, Bill Spiller, or Charlie Sifford, however, it seems that Wheeler never made any serious effort to challenge the policies of the Professional Golfers Association’s tour, instead remaining content to shine as arguably the brightest star in black professional golf in the early post-World War II period.

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