

"GOLF'S MASTER OF CEREMONIES" TOM DREESEN



If golf had a master of ceremonies, it would be Tom Dreesen hands-down! Not only does the nationally-renowned comedian serve in that capacity at the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am and the annual Bob Hope Chrysler Classic, as well as numerous events on the Celebrity Players Tour, including the celebrity tour stop at the prestigious Bolingbrook Golf Club, but Dreesen is one of America's best known and most admired celebrity and comedian. A veteran of stage and television, in 2009 Dreesen will be celebrating 40 years of comedy and making people laugh.

In this exclusive interview with Golf Now! Chicago, Dreesen talks candidly about his childhood years, getting interested in golf, his role in the Celebrity Players Tour, and what it takes to be successful today in any professional career.

Tom, tell us about your childhood and your family. What was it like growing up on the south side of Chicago in Harvey, Illinois? I had 8 brothers and sisters and we were considered very poor. Five of us actually slept in one bed. We had no bathtub and no shower — we lived in a shack; I called it a shack. We had no hot water, no bathtub and no shower. It wasn't during the Great Depression -- I'm not that old. It was a childhood of work at a very early age. At the age of 6 years old, I was already following my brother with a little shoe shine box. I started shining shoes from 6 to 12 years old at all the taverns in Harvey. At 12 years old, I started setting up pins in the bowling alleys, and then I caddied in the summertime. I also sold newspapers on the street corner, and I had a paper route. I sold The Harvey Tribune, which is now The Star Tribune, the Chicago Tribune, the Chicago Sun Times, the Chicago Daily News, etc. I had a very busy childhood. Even though I was a poor, raggedy kid, I always say that it was the

greatest thing that ever happened to me, because all of life is about perception and I had perceived it to be great.

At what age, Tom, did you realize that you were "funny" and had desires to become a comedian. How did you get started? When I was a little boy shining shoes in taverns, my mother was a bartender, and my uncle, Frank Polizzi, was behind the bar. He was my mother's brother-in-law. He was a very funny guy. He told jokes behind the bar all the time and I loved him so much and I emulated him. I would hear him tell a joke in the bar and I would tell the same joke to my friends. Many of the jokes he told shouldn't have been told on a Catholic school playground. But I loved telling jokes even at that early age.

You've been performing for close to 40 years! Tom, will you continue performing and making people laugh? Yes! Till the day I die. I want to be like George Burns. I went to see George Burns perform when he was 95, and he did an hour and 10 minutes in Lake Tahoe at Caesar's. I went backstage afterwards and he was so excited because he had written some new material that day. I thought that's me. That's what I want to do until they close the lid on me.

Are there any comedians who helped inspire you or mentors who helped you reach the level you are at today in show business? When I first started out, I admired comedians tremendously. Before I ever was in show business or even thought I would be in show business, I just thought comedians were just the coolest men and women in the world. That they could make a living making people laugh. And the thought overwhelmed me, that maybe one day I could do just that. So I emulated them."

"I want to be like George Burns. That's what I want to do until they close the lid on me."

I loved 2 comedians -- one was Jack Benny and the other was Richard Pryor. Pryor, because I grew up in Harvey, Illinois -- a neighborhood like Pryor's. Pryor always talked about Peoria, Illinois, and the kind of characters in his neighborhood were the kind of characters in my neighborhood, so I identified with it. But Jack Benny made comedy look easy. I think a person is an artist in any endeavor when they make his or her work look one word 'effortless'! Jack Benny made comedy look easy. Frank Sinatra made singing look easy. And yet it's not. So that's the kind of comedian that I wanted to be. I wanted to have the poise of a Jack Benny.

Let's talk a little bit about your love for golf. How did you get interested in golf? As a little boy, I caddied at Ravisloe Country Club in Homewood, Illinois and it



was such a great environment for me. As a little boy all I originally wanted to do was to be a bartender. I thought tavern owners were the richest people in the world, because my dad spent all his money in the bars. So when I first went to Ravisloe, I saw a different environment. I was caddying for doctors and lawyers and successful men and women, Mr. Florsheim from Florsheim Shoes and people like that.

I began to dream a year or two later that maybe I could be more than just a

bartender because of my environment changing, and so I got interested in golf as a little boy.

“The Celebrity Players Tour is one of the most exciting things that I have ever been involved in.”

Tell us about the Celebrity Players Tour; how it got started, the purpose of the Tour and your role in it. The Celebrity Players Tour is basketball, baseball, football, hockey, tennis and show business people that are a 10 handicap or below. It got started because celebrities wanted to play competitive golf, yet, maybe make some money for it. Celebrities are asked to go to all of these golf events that raise hundreds of thousands of millions of dollars for charity. Oftentimes, it would cost us money to go to the event. Now we found a way we could go raise money for charity, and yet we could



all make something and compete against one another. The Celebrity Players Tour is one of the most exciting things that I have ever been involved in. I'm one of the founders and I'm also on the board. I've been on the board since day one.

Why are you different from the other golf tours out there such as the PGA, LPGA, Champions Tour, Nationwide, etc.? Because they are pure Golf Tours and we're a Corporate Hospitality Entertainment Tour. Do our guys play good golf? You bet they do – but they can't compete with the skills of the Professionals. However, when it comes to entertaining corporate America and their clients then the Pro's can't compete with us. Our guys are corporate friendly and go out of their way to make sure that the sponsors and their guests have such a good time that they can hardly wait till next year.

Tom, you have been given the title in magazines and newspapers as “The Master

of Ceremonies of Golf’. How did that come about? As you know at every major golf event in the country there's usually a Gala for all the participants from players to title sponsors. And, besides dinner and awards, there's always entertainment. Years ago Bob Hope asked me to take over as Master of Ceremonies for his Gala because I was already the Master of Ceremonies for the Frank Sinatra Golf Tournament, and then Clint Eastwood asked me to emcee the AT&T show at Pebble Beach –which I do every year. Not to mention the Celebrity Players Tour calls on me to emcee and perform at





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all their events. And now, Tiger Woods has asked me to emcee his event at the Congressional as well as a couple of other events he's involved in. Arnold Palmer has asked me to emcee his event at Bay Hill a couple of times as do many other touring pro's at their functions and this last year the Golf Writers Association of America asked me to emcee their awards dinner at the Masters in Augusta and one of their writers introduced me as "The Master of Ceremonies of Golf" so there you have it...

Tom, do you have any advice you can give to those interested in a professional career on stage or on the links. What does it take to build a successful career and life? Constant dedication. It takes constant dedication morning, noon and night. Bertrand Russell once said, 'there are people in show business who become major stars simply because they didn't have sense enough to quit when they should have.' That's my story and that's anybody's story who gets to a high level in his profession. It's the hard work and the hard work ethic that makes the difference. You might have natural skills and ability, but if you don't dedicate yourself to the craft, you won't be successful. The other thing I would say is to stay away from chemicals.

Stay away from booze and drugs, because if you need chemicals to get you out

there to perform, then you already are in the wrong profession. It should come naturally. The best way to destroy any career is with alcohol or drugs.

"I really believe that service to humanity is the best work of life."

Tom, can you share a personal insight with us before we close? I truly feel, and you and I discussed this earlier, that in the end, how do you measure a human life? How do you measure if you made any difference? Emerson said, 'you should leave this world better than you found it'. And I always think that this is probably one of the great measurements if you lived a good life. If you leave the world better than you found it. Again, my favorite quotation is, 'some men measure their lives by days and years, others by love affairs, passions and tears, but the truest measure under the sun is what in your life for others you've done'. And that's kind of my credo ... I really believe that service to humanity is the best work of life. If somehow your performance or job skill can make people better off for having had your service,

and I think comedy does that for me.



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