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THIS LIFE WITH GRACIE

Atlanta desegregation began on a golf course

Little-known story a good example of why we need Black History Month

By Gracie Bonds Staples | The Atlanta Journal-Constitution | Friday/February 5, 2016

At a once forbidden place for African Americans, Michael Holmes talked about the moment members of his family challenged segregation in Atlanta for the first time.

In 1951, Holmes' father Alfred "Tup" Holmes, uncle Oliver Holmes, grandfather Dr. Hamilton M. Holmes and family friend **Charles Bell** were turned away from the historic Bobby Jones Golf Course in northwest Atlanta and would go on to launch one of the first desegregation lawsuits in Atlanta.

Charles Bell, left, Oliver Holmes and Alfred "Tup" Holmes get ready to tee off at the North Fulton Golf Course on December 24, 1955. Tup Holmes decided to play there instead of the Bobby Jones Golf Course to avoid potential violence from whites.

Tup Holmes left that day without incident, but two years later in 1953 he filed suit against the city. The following year, District Judge Boyd Sloan ruled that blacks could play golf but only in accordance with the city's "separate but equal doctrine."

While preserving segregation, the city was ordered to devise a system to accommodate African Americans. The city's solution was to allow blacks to use the public courses on Mondays and Tuesday. Tup Holmes, an amateur golf champion, balked.

The case, argued by a young Thurgood Marshall, went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which decreed separate but equal unconstitutional and sent the case back to the district court to reverse the decision and render in favor of the plaintiffs.

On Dec. 24, Tup Holmes, his brother Oliver and **Bell** became the first blacks to legally play on an Atlanta course. To avoid potential violence and the media, they played at the **North Fulton Golf Course**.

Many may remember Michael Holmes' brother, Dr. Hamilton E. Holmes, who braved the hostility of racists to integrate the University of Georgia with Charlayne Hunter in 1961. Certainly they recall the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision that declared separate but equal school unconstitutional. And yet few remember the drive down the fairway that ended segregation.

If you ever needed a reason for observing Black History Month, this is it. This is **why comments by actress Stacy Dash** a few weeks ago suggesting getting rid of the observance is so, well, clueless.

Until recently, I had never heard the story of Tup Holmes, and neither had Lake Brown.

Michael Holmes, 69 of Atlanta talks about the opening of the Alfred "Tup" Holmes exhibit in the clubhouse of the Bobby Jones Golf Course late last year. Holmes' father Alfred "Tup" Holmes, uncle Oliver Holmes, grandfather Dr. Hamilton M. Holmes and family friend **Charles Bell** launched what is said to be the first desegregation lawsuit in Atlanta after they were turned away from the Bobby Jones Golf Course in 1951

A transplant from Charleston, West Virginia, Brown first heard of the Holmes family story in 1999 when a friend invited him to a round of golf at Bobby Jones.

"This absolutely stunned me," Brown said. "Atlanta in 1950 was very similar to Birmingham, Ala. It took courage to do what they did."

At first Brown didn't do anything with Tup's story, but it nagged him until finally he got an audience with the Friends of the Bobby Jones Golf Course. Three weeks before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man in Montgomery, Ala., the civil rights movement had already begun on an Atlanta golf course and few knew about it.

Meanwhile**,** after living most of his life in Manhattan, Michael Holmes returned to Atlanta in 2011 and noticed the course named for his father, the Alfred "Tup" Holmes Memorial Golf Course in Atlanta, was unkempt. At the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, there was no mention of his father.

His family's role in history seemed to have vanished, but Holmes wasn't compelled to do anything about it.

When he was growing up, family members rarely talked about the case.

"I was 5 years old when this first happened," said Holmes, 69. "Like many things in life, you just incorporate them in your being. You didn't dwell on what used to be."

When **the Friends of Bobby Jones Golf Course** approached Holmes last year about establishing a permanent exhibit to honor the life and legacy of Tup Holmes, he felt uneasy.

“I didn’t want to be the pawn of white people,” he said.

Eventually, though, something in Michael Holmes shifted.

“I came to feel comfortable with the leadership of Friends of Bobby Jones Golf Course and decided to jointly pursue the effort to honor my father at the clubhouse and to save it from irrelevancy.”

With help from Brown, Georgia Tech and the Smithsonian Institution, **the exhibit opened in the Bobby Jones clubhouse on Nov. 7**, the 60th anniversary of the Holmes v. Atlanta decision.

“This is the result of that effort,” Holmes said. “We have documented this. What we don’t have is artifacts, old clubs or old trophies, but we have the story.”

That story, along with the broader “game changing” impact of Holmes v. Atlanta, is retold in a series of black-and-white photographs and newspaper clippings posted in the club’s **Heritage Room.**

Lucky for us, Lake Brown recognized the importance of that moment in black history. Now the rest of us can, too.

Each week **Gracie Bonds Staples** will bring you a perspective on life in the Atlanta area. Life with Gracie runs online Tuesday, Thursday and alternating Fridays.

Reporter Newspapers
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By Joe Earl | November 22, 2015

History made on golf course

Michael Holmes stands with a photo of his father, golfer Alfred "Tup" Holmes, that is included in a new exhibit at the Bobby Jones Golf Course.

History can rise in surprising places. Important events don't all occur on faraway fields or in exotic locales. Sometimes, important events, the ones that make us who we are, took place right around the corner, in places still in plain sight.

Like, say, a golf course.

One recent Saturday morning, a crowd of golf and history buffs gathered in the clubhouse of the Bobby Jones Golf Course to remember a round of golf that had been played there on Christmas Day six decades ago.

Or, to put it more precisely, they recalled a round of golf that had not been played and then, years later, on Christmas Day 1955, went forward under an order issued by the United States Supreme Court. That game of golf helped change many things, and opened Atlanta recreation facilities to all of the city's residents.

In 1951, an Atlanta golfer named Alfred “Tup” Holmes and a group of his friends went to the Bobby Jones Golf Course in Buckhead and asked to play a round. Holmes and his friends were turned away. They were black. The city-owned golf course was open only to whites. The city owned no golf courses then where blacks were allowed to play. Black golfers played on private courses segregated for use only by black players.

Charles Bell Sr. was part of the foursome turned away from the Bobby Jones Golf Course in 1951.

Charles Bell Sr. remembers the match that wasn’t played in 1951. He was there, part of the foursome Holmes brought to the Bobby Jones course that day. “We came to the clubhouse,” said **Bell**, who’s now **97 years old** and lives in Warner Robins, GA.

“We prepared to pay our fees. We were just informed that because of our color, we were not allowed to play,” he said.

They had expected to be rejected, he said. They intended to challenge the city’s segregationist laws in court. “We planned it. We knew we would be denied the right to play,” he said. “We decided to come to the Bobby Jones course… and the rest is history.”

They did make history. The group’s effort to play golf on the whites-only course came years before the U.S. Supreme Court would strike down legal segregation in public schools and facilities. It came years before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white passenger, spurring the Montgomery, Ala., bus boycott. “We were still deep in the thrall of Jim Crow [laws],” said Anne Emanuel, a professor emerita at Georgia State Law School.

Demanding the right to play golf on a city course in 1951 was a brave act, Emanuel said. “It was hard,” she said. “It was dangerous to get in front of that train. …. The courage factor. Probably Atlanta was the only place in Georgia you would survive if you did this. The times were very different and very dangerous.”

Holmes and members of his family filed suit against the city. Their case worked its way to the Supreme Court, where it was among the first group of desegregation decisions

announced after the landmark Brown v. the Board of Education case desegregated public schools.

The Holmes family case was among a group of cases that extended the rules applied in the Brown case to other public recreation facilities, such as the Bobby Jones Golf Course, Emanuel said. Michael Holmes, Tup Holmes' son, said the decision has been referenced 51 times in other cases.

"It was a big deal," Emanuel said.

Bell and Emanuel were part of a group of about 75 people that gathered at the Bobby Jones clubhouse to mark the **60th anniversary of the decision, released Nov. 7, 1955**, with the formal opening of a new exhibit about the case called "Holmes v. Atlanta: Changing the Game." The exhibit, sponsored by the Friends of the Bobby Jones Golf Course and put together by Georgia Tech professor Mary McDonald and her graduate students, includes information about Holmes, his family and the lawsuit.

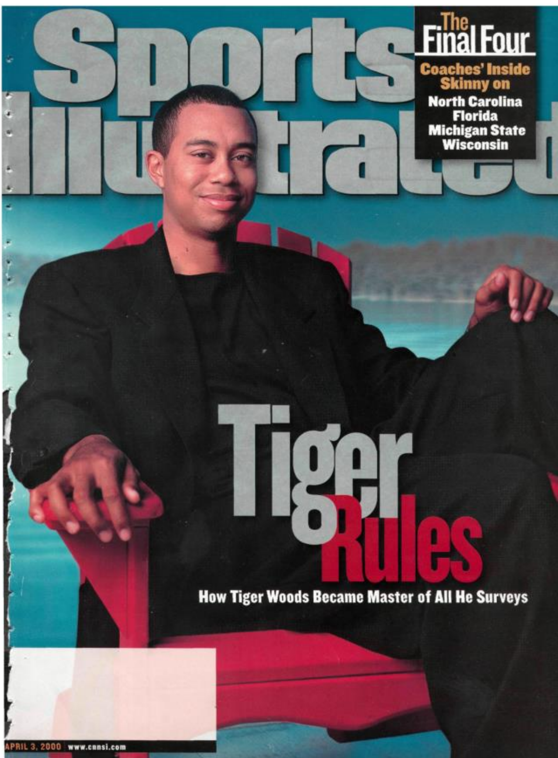
"We felt like it was a story that needed to be preserved," McDonald said. "I think it's got all sorts of really important issues connected to it. And it's an Atlanta story."

Just a few weeks after the Supreme Court ruled, Holmes and his friends got the chance to play golf on a city course.

They actually played their first round under the judge's order on Christmas Eve at North Fulton Golf Course. Bell remembers it was a more prestigious course than Bobby Jones. Others suggested the idea might have been to have that groundbreaking first round played somewhere other than Bobby Jones to avoid a racial confrontation. Bell remembers there were photographers on hand to record the event and said that some people may have shouted catcalls at the players. But he admits it's hard to recall particulars now.

The next day, Christmas Day, Holmes and his foursome played a round at the Bobby Jones course. And, as **Charles Bell** said, they made history.

Sports Illustrated | April 3, 2000



Crossing the Line

YEARS BEFORE ROSA PARKS REFUSED TO TAKE A SEAT IN THE BACK OF A BUS, A SMALL GROUP OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN GOLFERS STRUCK A BLOW FOR RACIAL JUSTICE BY DEMANDING TO PLAY A SEGREGATED MUNICIPAL COURSE IN THE HOMETOWN OF BOBBY JONES

By Jack McCallum

Shortly after he took Augusta by a 12-stroke storm in 1997, **Tiger Woods** proclaimed on Oprah that he was not the first African American to win a major. Rather, he was the first Cablinasian-- i.e., one-eighth Caucasian, a quarter black, one-eighth American Indian, a quarter Chinese and a quarter Thai--to do so. The 25% of Woods that is African-American got an important history lesson the following year when he first heard about the groundbreaking struggle of four black golfers, three from one family, to desegregate Atlanta's Jim Crow courses, a struggle that reached all the way to the Supreme Court.

Woods and his father, Earl, were fascinated when they heard the details because the story of the Holmes family never did get much national attention and has now been all but forgotten. Even many of the golfers who play at Alfred (Tup) Holmes Memorial Golf Course in Adams Park, a fine little layout in the southwest section of the city, are unaware of why the course is so named. But, please, as you get ready to plunk down your money in the office Masters pool and gear up to hear, once again, of the legendary exploits of the master of the Masters, Robert Tyre Jones Jr., pull up a chair, pour yourself a bourbon (Tup Holmes's favorite drink) and listen to the story of these common men who did an uncommon thing.

The story begins, in fact, at a municipal course in Atlanta named after Bobby Jones and includes absolutely nothing from the mouth of the great man himself. For one who spoke so eloquently about playing the game the right way, there is only one way to judge Jones in this matter: complicit by his silence.

By 1951, 33-year-old Alfred Fountain Holmes, called Tup after a comic-strip character of the time, was fed up. Fed up with deteriorating conditions at Lincoln Country Club, which was located hard by a cemetery and was the place where most of Atlanta's African-American golfers did their playing. Fed up with Lincoln's board of directors, who refused to spend money to upgrade the nine-hole course. Fed up with the reality that all around there were outstanding courses closed to him because of a city ordinance banning minorities from certain public facilities. Fed up with how little things had changed for a black golfer since 1939, the year he was prohibited from competing in the NCAA tournament because of the color of his skin.

The moment when Holmes actually decided to try to integrate a municipal course is lost to history. Only one man directly involved in the story is still alive--**Charles T. Bell, 81**, who calls himself "the sole survivor"--and he isn't sure about the date. But by the summer of 1951, Tup was spoiling for a fight, and he had a lot going for him. Tup had confidence. His father, Dr. Hamilton Mayo Holmes, was a quiet man but he taught his three sons to speak out when they felt it was necessary. Dr. Holmes also happened to be a member of the Lincoln board that Tup was criticizing. Tup had smarts. He was a 1939 graduate of the Tuskegee Institute and the shop steward for black workers at Lockheed Aircraft in Marietta, Ga. He was a bit of a con man, too, with the gift of gab. Not incidentally, Tup was a terrific golfer. He had won the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference tournament three times while he was at Tuskegee and later was a three-time champion of the Southern Amateur, both black-only events. Tup's swing had been refined by the immortal Teddy (Rags) Rhodes, one of the pioneers of black golf. "Anything Tup wanted to be, he could've been," says **Bell**. "He was the most jovial man you'd ever meet, but he had a fire about him, too. You didn't cross Tup because Tup was afraid of nothing."

On the morning of July 19, 1951, three years before the Supreme Court handed down its landmark decision, Brown v. Board of Education, and four years before Rosa Parks declined to take a seat in the back of a bus in Montgomery, Ala., three members of the Holmes family--the doctor, Tup and Tup's older brother, the Reverend Oliver Wendell Holmes--and **Bell**, a family friend and the principal in **Bell Realty**, drove to Bobby Jones Golf Course on the north side of town. **Bell** doesn't remember why that course was chosen, only that it was Tup's decision. By that time a black man named Kussuth Hill, the son of another prominent black doctor, had already teed off at Jones. Hill was an extremely lightskinned African-American with blond hair. Tup had called Hill the night before and asked him to go out to Jones. As **Bell** remembers it, Hill had gotten onto white courses in Atlanta before, making him history's Invisible Integrator.

The four men walked into the pro shop and reached for their wallets, only to be told by the club pro, Bill Wilson, "I'm sorry. Negroes cannot play here." Wilson spoke politely but firmly. "Is it because of our color?" they asked. "It's because of a rule prohibiting minorities from playing on public courses," answered Wilson.

"Did you know there's a Negro playing your course right now?" Tup asked Wilson. Wilson looked surprised, but he didn't ask for a name, and the men didn't give him one. Then they turned and walked out. "It was the result we expected," **Bell** says.

The next day a small story appeared in The Atlanta Constitution under the headline, 4 NEGROES TEST CITY PARK BAN. Every white power broker in town, and around the state, hoped that would be the last of it. It wasn't. Tup formed the Atlanta Golf Committee, retaining the services of a family friend named Roscoe Edwin Thomas, who thereafter would be described in the press as "the Negro lawyer representing the Holmeses." Faced with the threat of litigation, Atlanta mayor William Hartsfield set aside $75,000 to buy land to build a separate public course for black golfers, but the course was never built because the city leaders said that not enough blacks played the game. Tup collected 100 signatures on a petition to counter that argument. Still, the city did nothing.

So in June 1953 the Holmes family filed suit in U.S. District Court asking that the city's segregation of golf courses be declared unconstitutional. Judge Boyd Sloan soon gave the Holmeses a hollow victory: He ruled that blacks had a Constitutional right to play golf but only in accordance with Atlanta's separate-butequal doctrine, a popular legal roadblock to integration. In New Orleans, for example, blacks could play golf on Tuesdays and Fridays, whites on all the other days, and never the twain shall meet. Atlanta offered up Mondays and Tuesdays for black golf. The Holmeses said thanks but no thanks. With the help of the NAACP and Thurgood Marshall, Tup and his father took the case further. But the Court of Appeals in New Orleans ruled that the plaintiffs had gotten "all the relief they asked for." Only one step remained--the Supreme Court.

On Nov. 7, 1955, 29 months after the Holmes family had filed, the Earl Warren Court struck down Sloan's original ruling and sent the case back to him with instructions to end segregation. Victory. After four years. On Dec. 22, Sloan ordered Atlanta to desegregate its municipal courses immediately. There was much sentiment in the white community to close the courses rather than allow blacks to play whenever they chose. Hartsfield advocated keeping the courses open because closing them "would deprive nearly 70,000 white players...of their rights" and "nearly 100 city employees of their jobs...in order to deny a few dozen Negro players the use of the golf links." The mayor also reminded angry whites that the court's decision did not apply to municipal playgrounds and swimming pools.

Based on comments made by Georgia governor Marvin Griffin, Hartsfield could've been the NAACP's man of the year. "I'd a plowed them [the courses] up the next morning and planted alfalfa," said Griffin, who added, "All attempts to mix races, whether they be in the classroom, on the playgrounds, in public conveyances or in any other area of close personal contact, constitute the gravest peril to harmonious race relations in Georgia and the South."

Griffin's attorney general, Eugene Cook, weighed in with his opinion that the Supreme Court's real agenda was promulgating interracial marriage. The North Side News, an

Atlanta weekly, called Hartsfield's decision "a Pearl Harbor attack" and offered this opinion: "The mayor had delivered the white man's park to the Negroes. That is really the lowest one could expect from an elected Caucasian in the betrayal of public trust."

Isabella Holmes, Tup's wife, says the period following the court's decision was frightening. "The phone calls never stopped," she says. "You can't imagine the things they called us." They got an unlisted number, but the calls kept coming. Some were threatening. Some were obscene. All conveyed a stay-off-ourgolf-courses message. A number of prominent Atlanta blacks, some who feared retribution and others who believed that a rich man's game would never be integrated anyway, tried to persuade the family to ignore the court decision and stick to playing black courses. "My family heard it from both ends," says Tup's son Gary, who was 12 at the time. Some blacks asked Tup's sister, Alice Washington, to prevail upon her brother. She laughed at the notion. "As if he would listen to anyone," she said.

On Dec. 23 the three Holmeses, Bell and several other black golfers held a strategy session with Thomas in his office on Auburn Avenue. The atmosphere around the city was tense. Rumors had surfaced that whites were planning violence against blacks who tried to tee off and that blacks had stuffed weapons in their golf bags, both for aggression and protection. The Holmes family decided that Dr. Holmes, who was 71, would stay home. Also, the destination would not be Bobby Jones, where a media horde and possible trouble would be waiting.

On Christmas Eve morning, sometime around 10, seven black men showed up at the North Fulton Golf Course in Atlanta's Buckhead section: Tup and brother Oliver; Bell; Arthur Peterson, who was also in real estate; T.D. Hawkins, the head teller at a black-owned bank in Atlanta; J.H. Calhoun, president of the Atlanta chapter of the NAACP; and attorney Thomas. No one expected them. A white man who was placing his clubs on a pull cart saw them coming, turned and ran toward the pro shop. "I always imagined what that man was yelling," says Bell, laughing at the memory. ***"'The niggers is coming! The niggers is coming!'"***

African American golfers integrate the North Fulton public golf course in Atlanta, Ga., December 24, 1955. Left to right, C. T. Bell, Alfred "Tup" Holmes, and Oliver Holmes. Copyright Bettmann/CORBIS.

The men walked into the pro shop and Tup immediately pulled out a $50 bill. "I'll take some of those balls, and let me pay for my registration out of that," he said. Bell pulled out a fifty, too. "We didn't want them

to think we had a case of the shorts," says Bell. The attendant took their money and assigned them caddies. They walked to the 1st tee and went off as a threesome (the brothers and **Bell**) and a twosome (Peterson and Hawkins). Calhoun and Thomas walked with them but didn't play. **Bell**, who at that moment was unconcerned with historical minutiae, doesn't recall who teed off first.

The press eventually heard that the Holmes party was at North Fulton and descended on the course. **Bell** remembers mistaking, for a split second, a long lens for a shotgun. A couple of holes ran by the road and some passersby made their feelings clear. "Stay off the course, niggers!" they yelled. But the white golfers couldn't have been more gracious. "We're glad to have you," one man told them early in the round. "It's been a long time." The course wasn't crowded. The men played the front nine, ate lunch in the clubhouse and finished the back nine. The papers reported Tup's score, a 79. **Bell** doesn't remember any other specifics except that Tup's score was the lowest. They walked to their car, packed up their clubs and drove away--into the fine print of history.

That historic round didn't exactly spray-paint the alabaster landscape of golf. Many whites in Atlanta stopped going to municipal courses and joined private clubs, thereby practicing a de facto segregation that continues today. The PGA of America didn't remove a disgraceful Caucasians-only membership requirement from its constitution until November 1961, and it wasn't until 1975 that a black, Lee Elder, played in the Masters.

If Bobby Jones, who was Mr. Golf not only in Atlanta but also around the world, ever made a public utterance about the Holmes family or the desegregation of golf at a course named after him, it has gone unrecorded. Dr. Catherine Lewis, an Atlanta historian who organized a permanent Bobby Jones exhibit at the Atlanta History Center and who is an unabashed fan of the man, says, "There's no doubt that one word from Bobby Jones could've ended segregated golf in this country. But he didn't speak up."

Bell says he and Tup had black friends in the service industry who heard Jones make disparaging comments about blacks. "All I'll say," **Bell** says, "is that Bobby Jones was no friend of ours."

Charlie Yates, who at 86 is still going strong as the secretary of the Augusta National Golf Club, which Jones cofounded in 1931, learned the game from Jones. Yates has met Gary Holmes and Bell, and both speak highly of Yates for his efforts to help minority golfers at the revitalized East Lake Country Club in Atlanta. The question about Jones clearly makes Yates uncomfortable. "I can't really speak for Bobby, about how much he knew about what was going on," says Yates. Later, Yates offers this: "Despite what you may have heard about [Masters chairman] Cliff Roberts, he was committed to having any minority person who qualified under the guidelines play in the Masters." But Roberts is also the man who said, "As long as I'm alive, golfers will be white and caddies will be black."

What about Jones? "Again, I can't speak for Bob," says Yates, "but I never heard him grumble about [having blacks play at Augusta National]. Bob and Cliff were both dedicated to having the best people play."

The golfer who won the Masters in '97, and who is favored to win it again this year, is black, 25% of him anyway. During a stopover in Atlanta in '98, Woods and his father met with Isabella, Gary and another of Tup's sons, Herbert. Earl reminded Gary of his father, the gung ho, take-charge attitude, the confidence, the gift of gab. At a press conference Earl announced the creation of a $2,500 Tup Holmes Memorial Scholarship, which goes annually to an outstanding African-American student in the Atlanta public school system.

Ten years after Tup was turned away at the Jones course, another of his sons, Hamilton, walked through the doors of the University of Georgia; he and Charlayne Hunter were the first students to integrate that institution. Hamilton was a prominent orthopedic surgeon in the Atlanta area until his death in 1995. Today, if you're driving on I-20 in Atlanta, you exit at Hamilton E. Holmes Drive and go north to reach Lincoln Cemetery, where Tup is buried. There is no sign of Lincoln Country Club, which was destroyed in a fire in the '70s.

Bell, who lives near Macon, is still in the real estate business and plays golf a couple times a week. He feels proud when he looks around the golfing landscape and sees color. The club pros at Bobby Jones and, appropriately, Tup Holmes, are black. Bell goes on golf trips and sees dozens of black faces pouring off buses to play courses that used to be closed to them. He follows golf's No. 1 Cablinasian with a passion and feels there will be more Tigers when minority golf programs, such as the one that Yates helped shepherd through at East Lake, start bearing fruit.

Bell plays most of his golf at Hickory Hill, a public course in Jackson, Ga., halfway between Macon and Atlanta, easy driving distance for him and his son, a lawyer in Atlanta. He's known as Sweet Swinging Charlie for the fluid grace that usually keeps his score below 100. He's popular and well-known around the club, but every once in a while he's reminded of the old days. "Some folks don't want to play with me," says Bell. "But the pro here, Allen Byars, keeps a check on that. Anybody who shows any of those, well, vestiges of racism, isn't welcome. You know my philosophy? If they don't want to play with me, I don't want to play with them."

For a long time, Tup Holmes felt that way, too. Then he had a different idea.

BLACK ENTERPRISE

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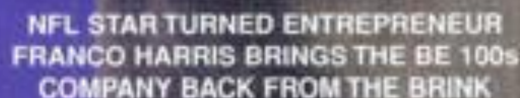

BREAKING PAR AGAINST RACISM: HOLMES VS. ATLANTA

Before Shoal Creek in 1990. Before Lee Elder integrated the Masters in 1975. Before Rosa Parks refused to go to the back of a Birmingham bus in 1955, an affluent black family in Georgia, one hopelessly addicted to righting wrongs, risked life and limb to win a Supreme Court ruling that forever desegregated public golf courses in Atlanta.

Dr. Hamilton M. Holmes Sr., his sons Alfred (Tup) and Oliver Wendell, all deceased, and family friend Charles T. Bell Jr., took on the white establishment and won one of the first instances of integration in the south. Ironically, six years after the 1955 Supreme Court decision, one of Tup's four sons, Hamilton M. Holmes Jr., integrated the University of Georgia. It's no wonder, then, that a golf course in Atlanta is named in honor of Tup and that a major thoroughfare in Atlanta was recently dedicated in memory of his son, Dr. Hamilton E. Holmes, who died last October.

"It goes way back to what our parents always taught us, that we didn't have to take back seats to anybody," says Alice Holmes Washington, Tup's only sister. "My mother, in 1905, was founder of the Professional Graduate Nurses Association for Negroes. As daddy learned to play golf, he was interested in having decent facilities.

"This is the way we were brought up. My father's first patient when he came to Atlanta was a white woman, which was again in violation of Jim Crow laws. We, as children, knew there were things that needed to be done and we went out and did them."

Tup went out and made *Holmes et al vs. Atlanta* his personal crusade in 1951 after his foursome was denied entrance to the Bobby Jones public golf course because they were black. The suit, which was bankrolled by Dr. Holmes Sr., was filed in U.S. District Court in 1953 by attorney Roscoe E. Thomas and created quite a firestorm in Atlanta, even among blacks.

Dr. Hamilton M. Holmes Sr. is flanked by his sons Alfred "Tup" Holmes and Oliver Wendell Holmes

"I took calls from a lot of black people who thought this was folly," says Alice Holmes Washington. "They kept saying, 'Why are ya'll doing this? Don't rock the boat. Try to talk Tup out of this; he's the hothead.'"

BREAKING PAR AGAINST RACISM: HOLMES VS. ATLANTA

Even Tup's wife, Isabella, tried to dissuade him. "My reaction as wife and mother was don't do it," she says. "We did go through those days with a lot of harassment. Telephone calls, things so ugly that I wouldn't dare repeat it. It was a pitiful thing for the family. It was something I lived with, but something that was very hurtful."

Charles T. Bell and the Holmes brothers play nine holes at North Fulton Golf Course after their Supreme Court victory.

The incident could have been resolved in 1954 had the group accepted a district court ruling by Judge Boyd Sloan. He agreed that blacks had a Constitutional right to play golf on public courses but only in accordance with Atlanta's "separate but equal" doctrine. He ordered the city to devise a plan to accommodate blacks while "preserving segregation." The city, in turn, decided that blacks could play on public courses every Monday and Tuesday.

"We would not sacrifice our talent and time and well being to accept one day or two days or three days," says Bell, now 77-years-old and the only surviving plaintiff of *Holmes et al vs. Atlanta*. "We wanted to play everyday." So the group appealed the decision, but an appellate court in New Orleans upheld the lower court ruling. That left Tup and company with no other choice but to take their case to the Supreme Court. Their persistence paid off when, on Nov. 7, 1955, the high court ruled against the city of Atlanta.

Thirty-eight days later, on Christmas Eve, 1955, Tup, Wendell and Bell teed off at the North Fulton County course, becoming the first blacks to legally play golf on a public facility in Atlanta. Blacks in Atlanta were so elated with the ruling, in fact, that they were on the links again the next day, even though it was Christmas.

"Naturally there was a lot of tension that first day," says Bell. "We registered and there was no opposition. We teed off just like anybody else. The fun came on the fourth or fifth hole. That's when the news media came running at us and we thought those cameras were machine guns or something, but we didn't panic. There were catcalls and the 'N word' spread around the course, but it died down after a little bit. By the third or fourth week, everyone was grabbing a set of clubs and going to play.

"We loved golf. That's what Tup lived for, to play golf," adds Bell. "We went almost every weekend to some facility out of the city—Nashville, Columbus,

BREAKING PAR AGAINST RACISM: HOLMES VS. ATLANTA

Birmingham. There were a number of cow pasture courses that blacks maintained.We had this camaraderie. They'd come visit us; we'd go visit them. We'd leave Sunday morning, drive 200 miles, play golf and then drive back that night."

Tup was one of the best amateur golfers in the area. He played at Tuskegee College and later won three National Negro Amateur Championships before dying of cancer in 1967. "He played with Joe Louis, Charlie Sifford, Lee Elder, Zeke Hartsfield, Teddy Rhodes, Howard Wheeler. He was equally as good as all of those players," says Bell. "He could drive the ball 300 yards, straight as an arrow," adds Gary M. Holmes, who used to caddie for his father.

"The reason Tup never turned pro is because he didn't have the desire. His father bankrolled him," explains Bell. "The Holmes family was *the* family in Atlanta in those days."

"They knew no strangers," says Isabella. "Everybody in Atlanta, from top to bottom, knew my husband."

According to most accounts, when Tup wasn't working at Lockheed, where he was a union rep, or when he wasn't selling life insurance, he was playing golf. He taught his father how to play and the two of them would travel all over the country or play at Atlanta's Lincoln Country Club.

Even though Dr. Holmes enjoyed golf as much as Tup, he chose not to play with Tup on that momentous Christmas Eve in '55 because he thought himself "too old to take what might come," says Isabella. There was talk that day of people packing guns inside their golf bags in the event of protests, but nothing ever came of it.

The landmark case of Holmes et al vs. Atlanta blazed a trail for Lee Elder to follow when he integrated the *Masters* in 1975.

Like his son, Dr. Holmes won a National Negro Seniors title and could drive the ball in the low 200s. "I remember he always used to say, 'Some folks are getting old and no good, I'm getting old and good.' He died when he was 81," says Gary Holmes. "He had gone out and played 18 holes that day, shot his age, came home, sat on the john and died."

Tup died two years later after doctors decided that his cancer had spread too far to be completely removed. Before he departed, though, he left