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Teeing it up at Charlotte's Dr. Charles L. Sifford Golf Course

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5-7 minutes

PGA Tour golfers Webb Simpson (right) and Derek Ernst (left) offer instruction at Greater First Tee of Charlotte Event at Dr. Charles L. Sifford Golf Course at Revolution Park

PGA Tour golfers Webb Simpson (right) and Derek Ernst (left) offer instruction at Greater First Tee of Charlotte Event at Dr. Charles L. Sifford Golf Course at Revolution Park Courtesy of Grant Baldwin Photography

Golf offers many life lessons to its practitioners. Humility, sportsmanship, dealing with breaks, both good and bad, how hard work and perseverance can yield big dividends.

Perseverance is easy to keep top of mind when teeing off at [Charlotte's Dr. Charles L. Sifford Golf Course](#) at Revolution Park: just consider the course's namesake.

It was 2011, when Charlotte's first municipal golf course built in the 1930s, was rechristened as Dr. Charles L. Sifford Golf Course at Revolution Park. The 9-hole, par 35 track bestowed the honor upon its native son in recognition of him being the first African American golfer to participate in a PGA Tour event and play

regularly on Tour, competing professionally against the world's best.

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The logo at Dr. Charles L. Sifford Golf Course at Revolution Park features the groundbreaking pioneer PGA golfer. Courtesy of Grant Baldwin Photography

Many consider Sifford the Jackie Robinson of golf, an homage to the Major League Baseball pioneer who broke the color barrier in 1947. Sifford's entrance into the elite — and formerly all-white — world of professional golf came in 1961, when giving way to the pressure of the California Attorney General, the PGA Tour permitted him full membership.

[Sifford, who passed away in 2015 at the age of 92](#), played in [422 PGA tournaments](#). He had 22 professional victories including six UGA National Negro Opens, three Gardena Valley the 1957 Long Beach Open, the 1967 Greater Hartford Open, the first fully sanctioned PGA event ever won by an African American, the 1969 Los Angeles Open and the 1975 PGA Seniors Championship. In 2004, he was elected to the World Golf Hall of Fame in St. Augustine, Florida, where visitors can view a locker there with clubs, clothing, awards and golf memorabilia curated by Sifford on display.

Contemporary golf great Tiger Woods has often said Sifford paved the way for players of color on the tour and found him to be a great lifetime inspiration. "One of the things that (my) dad had instilled in me is that — he grew up in an era with Charlie Sifford, and why my son is named after Charlie — is that you have to be twice as good to be given half a chance," said Woods, when speaking of Sifford.

“He was the Grandpa I never had. Without Charlie Sifford I probably wouldn’t be here. My dad would have never picked up the game. Sifford broke down (barriers).”

Only minutes for Charlotte’s city center

Today, the Sifford Golf Course is only three miles from Charlotte’s city center and offers golfers a challenging recreational getaway only minutes from the buzz of the Queen City’s urban core. A welcoming place for all golfers and all abilities, the track was not always inviting for Black golfers. When originally built as Bonnie Brae Golf Course on land donated by a prominent Charlotte family in the early 1930s, a stipulation was included in the use clause the course was to be for “whites only.” Not until 1951 when a challenge was escalated to the North Carolina Supreme Court did the course ultimately desegregate and allow play for all.

According to the [First Tee of Greater Charlotte](#) (a chapter of the national organization promoting youth golf), James Otis Williams, 17, was the first African American to play the Bonnie Brae Golf Course, shooting two over par on the nine-hole track. First Tee of Greater Charlotte serves more than 1,500 area-kids annually at their Learning Center and facilities adjacent to the Dr. Charles L. Sifford Golf Course at Revolution Park. The First Tee amenities include practice areas, putting green, a full driving range and indoor simulator.

Charlie Sifford would likely be awed by the reach of his legacy.

This story was created by [Detour](#), a journalism brand focused on the best stories in Black travel, in partnership with McClatchy's The Charlotte Observer and Miami Herald. Detour's approach to travel and storytelling seeks to tell previously under-reported or ignored

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