

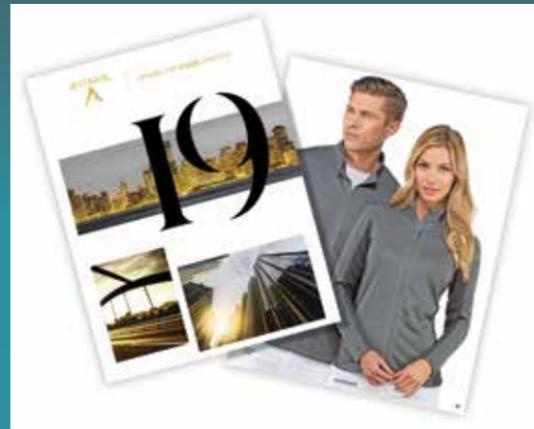
TRADITION

ANTIGUA CELEBRATES 40 YEARS OF SPORTS APPAREL SUCCESS

By Tom Mackin

In 1979 Fuzzy Zoeller became only third player to ever win the Masters in his first appearance. That same year, in a tiny office near the Scottsdale Airport, another rookie made its debut in the golf apparel industry.

The company was called Antigua, and four decades later it has carved out an impressive position in the both the golf and sports apparel categories. Ron McPherson has been there every step of the way. After joining the company as its first employee, he was named president in 1997 and became CEO in 2003.



“We’re trying to bang heads against the international behemoths like Nike, Adidas and Under Armour, so we have to pick our spots,” he said of Antigua, which has 320 employees and a team of independent sales people. “The reason why we’re still relevant in this industry is the way our business model still works. It’s getting harder because of labor costs, but we have inventory here, it’s on trend, and we can deliver it very quickly with a logo.”

McPherson has seen plenty of styles and materials come and go over the past four decades.

“In 1979, when you played golf you wore clothing that was specific to golf,” he said. “If you wore that in other parts of your life, it didn’t necessarily fit in. Things like Sansabelt pants with a two-piece, non-fused collar shirt that had saddle shoulders and a chest pocket was the golf uniform of the day.”

Cotton blends were the fabric du jour of the 1980s and 1990s. Then in the early 2000s performance fabrics – improved polyester blends featuring spandex and nylon – made their mark. “The biggest thing that changed the golf business from a fabric perspective was watching the great athletes in cycling,” said McPherson, who was inducted into the Arizona Golf Hall

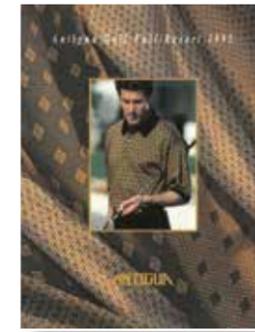
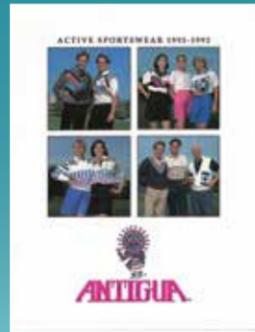
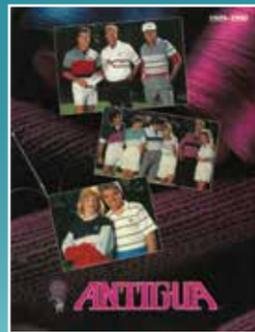
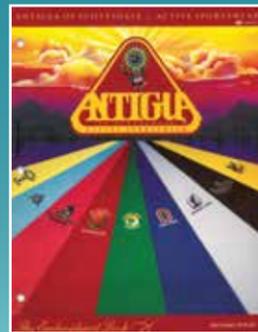
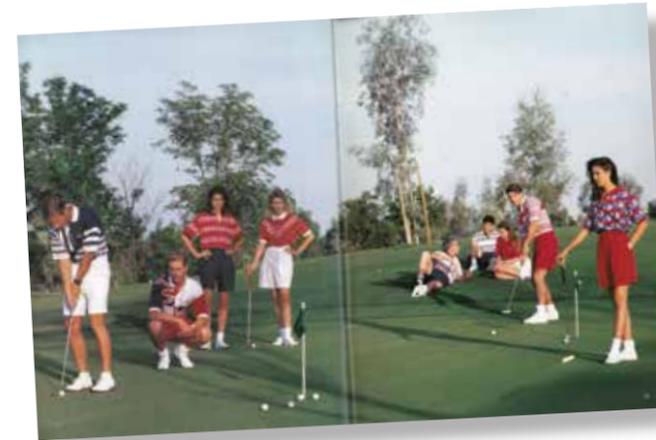
of Fame in 2011 and the Southwest PGA Hall of Fame last year. “They wore cotton which held moisture. But then they started wearing the very sleek polyester products with wicking capability. That moved into golf and all kinds of markets.”

Signing a licensing agreement with the NFL in 1989 was a critical step in the company’s evolution. “That was a really big deal,” said McPherson. “It continues to have reverberations today, because we are still an NFL licensee. While we were

known a little bit because of the green grass sector, that deal got us out there where people started saying, ‘Who are these guys and where did they come from?’”

The deal came about because of a need to diversify beyond just golf. “We could see based on the general sales trend in golf, where you have a peak in March and April, a little bit of a drop off in the summer, and then a slight peak in September, that we had lulls of getting

product on our machinery,” he said. “So we needed to find other compatible businesses to fit those gaps. The sports business was the biggest target because of the back-to-school scenario in June, July and August that fit in perfectly for our production cycle. Our colors and ability to decorate really fit in with sports. And fans want products with their team logos.”



THROUGH THE YEARS AT ANTIGUA



- 1979** Company founded in Scottsdale.
- 1982** Opened account with Pebble Beach for 1982 US Open.
- 1984-86** Expanded sales force to cover United States.
- 1989** Antigua consummates first license agreement with the NFL. Payne Stewart wins PGA Championship wearing Antigua/ NFL apparel at Kemper Lakes in Chicago.
- 1991** Antigua negotiates license arrangements with MLB, NBA and NHL. Antigua signs licensing agreement with Tournament Sports Marketing in Canada. Payne Stewart wins the U.S. Open at Hazeltine National Golf Club wearing Antigua apparel.
- 1993** Antigua is chosen by Captain Tom Watson to provide uniforms and other apparel for the 1993 U.S. Ryder Cup team.
- 1994** Billy Mayfair wins the Tour Championship at Southern Hills wearing Antigua apparel.
- 1995** Annika Sörenstam wins U.S. Women’s Open at Broadmoor Golf Club wearing Antigua apparel.
- 1996** Mark Brooks wins the PGA Championship at Valhalla wearing Antigua apparel.
- 1997** Antigua named for the fourth time a Ryder Cup preferred partner by the PGA of America.
- 1999** Antigua.com goes interactive.
- 2000** Antigua honored with International Platinum Partner Award in Corporate apparel industry.
- 2001** Antigua moves its operation to a new 110,000 square foot building in Peoria, AZ.
- 2003** Antigua majority interest purchased by Ashley NA a subsidiary of Sports Direct in the United Kingdom.
- 2004** Antigua receives Outstanding Partner Award from Delaware North Companies for Licensed Sports product sales and service.
- 2006** Antigua extends its presenting partnership in GOLF RETIREMENT PLUSTM with the PGA of America.

The NFL deal also brought about a relationship with Antigua's most high-profile spokesperson. "When we met with Frank Vuono at NFL Properties, he had an idea to promote the NFL through another sports figure," said McPherson. "He focused in on Payne Stewart because of his panache. We got chosen to do the apparel."

McPherson has fond memories of spending time with Stewart, who died in a October 1999 plane crash. "He was a cool guy. I remember he came into town for a photo shoot at the old Pima Golf Resort. We went there and Payne walked into the golf shop wearing jeans and a t-shirt. Jim Mooney, the head pro, looked at me like, 'What are you doing?' He thought I was pulling his leg. Then Payne changes into his outfit, walks out in his knickers, and suddenly he's Payne Stewart."

In 1991 Antigua inked licensing deals with Major League Baseball, the NBA and the NHL. "We didn't want to be a one-trick pony with only the NFL," said McPherson. "We worked



really hard to get those. It's like running for re-election; you have to get those renewed generally every three years. We now have all the ones that count, including NASCAR and some professional soccer, too. That puts us into a position to go to large sporting goods distributors and show that we're a year round opportunity with the products we create. We did lose the NFL for a 10-year stretch from 2002 through 2012 (when the league signed an exclusive deal with Reebok). But we got it back and have had it ever since, renewing it again this past November for another three-year deal."

The association with professional golfers has been a constant throughout the Antigua's history, including outfitting numerous U.S. Ryder Cup and Solheim Cup teams.

"The value is hard to measure but I think it's important," said McPherson. "We always get the questions about who is wearing our gear on the Tours. It's part of the golf business. We've had major winners like Payne,

Mark Brooks, Annika Sorenstam, and more. In the last several years we've had more of an LPGA influence (including major winner Stacy Lewis) since we're trying to grow the footprint of our women's business."

The market for the company's golf products split via gender lines, according to McPherson.

"Women are collection buyers. They look for a shirt that goes with a top, etc. The guys are item buyers and that hasn't changed since 1979. But the dominant product in the golf shops today, just like it was 40 years ago, is the men's golf shirt. It still makes up a hefty percentage of the overall apparel sales."

Antigua's offices have grown dramatically over the years. After starting in a tiny office (with two desks and one embroidery machine) on East Evans Road next to Scottsdale Airport, the company moved to a larger facility on nearby Acoma Road. From 1984 to 2001, the company was housed in a 50,000-square-foot facility near Via Linda and 90th Street. In 2001 it moved to its current Peoria location, where it occupies a custom-built facility that totals 110,000 square feet and uses a nearby 12,000-square foot storage facility. Products are designed and developed in Peoria before being produced in 25 mills around the world, mostly in Asia.

"Our success all starts with our people and a culture of taking care of our customers," said McPherson, a strong supporter of junior golf in the Valley. "That's allowed us to get through some pretty funky lines of apparel and trends (including the very vivid Southwest-style prints of the early 1990s). Sean Gregg has been our head of product development since 2003. His philosophy is we stay on trend, but we don't set the trend. Our team studies colors from other businesses around the world and interpret that with the world of golf. Our 2019 men's line is very pastel and the women's apparel is very floral. It's spot on the current overall trends." ■

Tom Mackin writes for numerous golf publications. He lives in Scottsdale.



2007 Antigua CEO and president Ron McPherson named recipient of the Ernie Sabayrac award by the PGA of America. Antigua consummates license agreement to design and distribute apparel and accessories under the Slazenger and Dunlop brands, and Canada.

2008 Antigua celebrates 30 years serving the industry, named official apparel of the Golf Channel Am Tour.

2009 Antigua CEO and president Ron McPherson inducted into AZ Golf Hall of Fame.

2010 Record year in overall sales lead by significant growth in Licensed Sports Division. Antigua provides USA Team uniforms for Solheim Cup matches in Colorado. Stacy Lewis wins the Women's British Open wearing Antigua apparel!

2011 Antigua serves as Official Golf Apparel Licensee for U.S. Solheim Cup Team. Antigua expands its E-Commerce fulfillment service to major online retailers.

2012 Antigua continues to service the NFL Experience, MLB All-Star Game, NHL Stanley Cup and NBA FanFest. Brittany Lange, Antigua Tour Player wins U.S. Open.

2013 Antigua CEO and president Ron McPherson inducted into the Southwest PGA Hall of Fame. Antigua signs distribution agreements with Axis Golf in Australia, New Zealand and Fiji and with ACI Brands in Canada.

2014 Antigua is featured in *Apparel Magazine* and announced as one of The Apparel All-Star Winners nominated by Lawson.

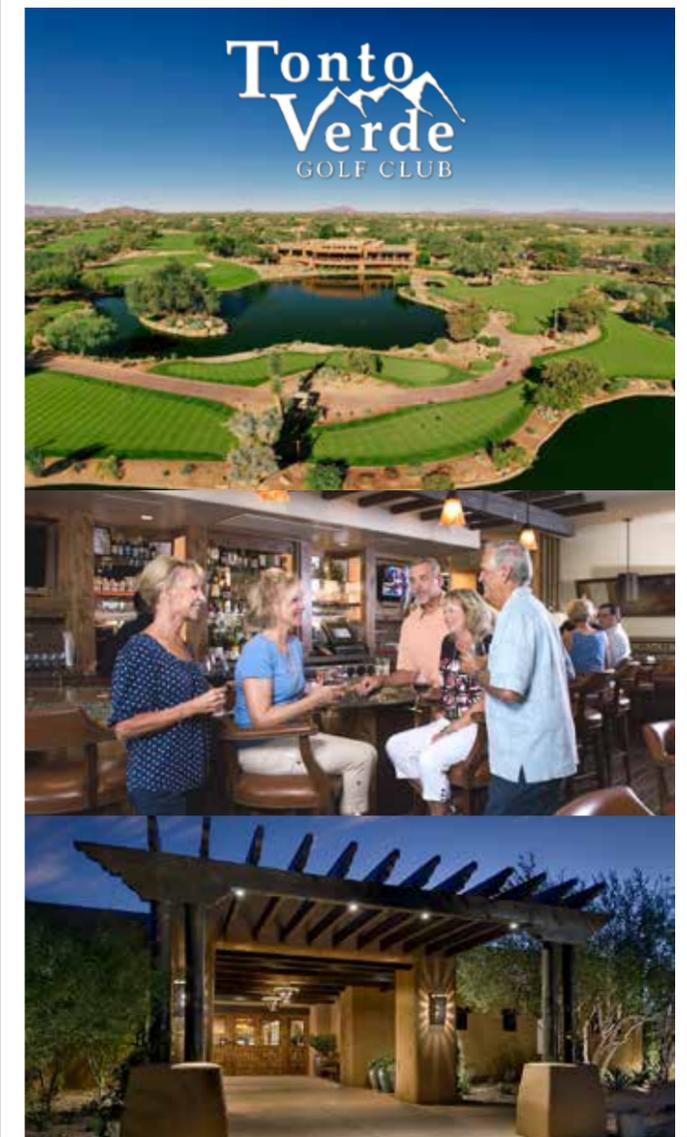
2015 Named Official Golf Apparel Licensee for 2011 U.S. Solheim Cup

2016 Antigua acquires NFL License for the second time in its history.

2017 Antigua is one of five brands available in the NFL Experience at the Super Bowl.

2018 Antigua serves as lead vendor and uniform designer for 2017 Solheim Cup. Holiday E-commerce fulfillment sales hit record sales level.

2019 Antigua will celebrate 40 Years of service to the golf, licensed sports and corporate apparel markets.



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