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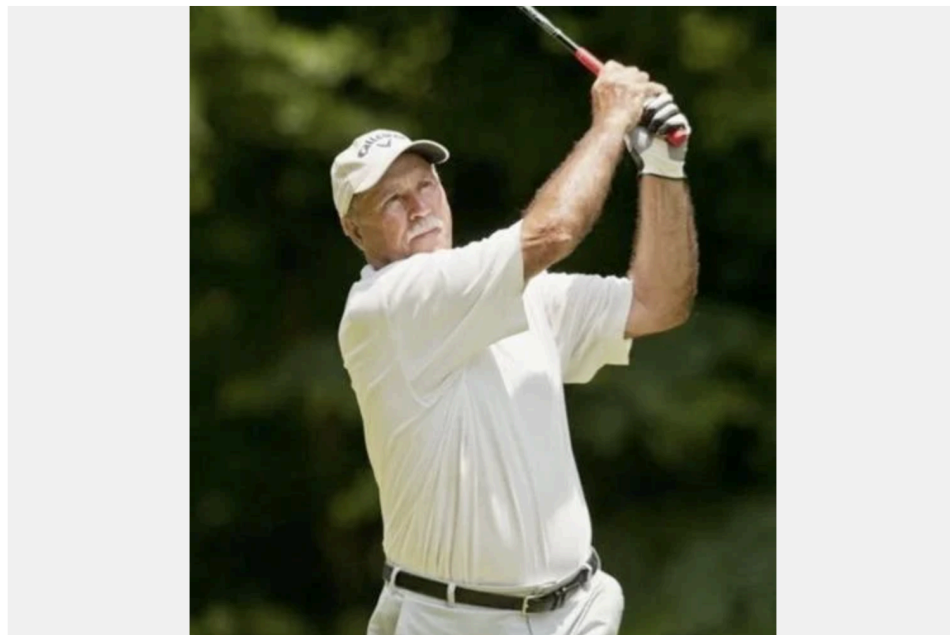
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Pike won in life by betting on himself

Jordan Stutts | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS | Jan. 21, 2026



Arlis Pike's secret to success at golf was simple: He fell in love with something he was good at and played for all its worth.

CONTRIBUTED

Born into poverty as the son of sharecroppers who settled in Kernersville, N.C., Arlis Pike swung a golf club, hit hard and hustled his way through life to become the stuff of local legend.

He didn't enter this world at a country club with a driver in hand. He was self-taught with strong arms powering a short, compact swing. He received his first 9-iron from his wife and high school sweetheart and practiced in his front yard every day, according to Pike's family.

Over the decades, Pike proved himself as a natural winner, turning an odd job as a greenskeeper into a professional career, lifelong passion and lucrative way to make games interesting.

He mixed humor with bravado to stoke frustration and earn respect among other golfers. He won everything from putting competitions to local and regional championships, and his friends say he cleaned up as a smart yet ambitious bettor anteing both low-stakes wagers and playing in million-dollar underground tournaments.

Pike's secret to success was simple: From hitting golf balls with buddies at 4 a.m. to playing on the Senior PGA Tour, he fell in love with something he was good at and played for all its worth.

But the tragedy about legends is they all must come to an end. On Dec. 30, Pike died from complications of a brain tumor. He was 78 years old.

'The King'

On a rainy Saturday morning in January, those who knew Pike best gathered at Pine Knolls Golf Club on the outskirts of Kernersville to recount his legacy.

Large puddles pooled over brown grass on the Hole 1 tee box where "The King," as Pike became known, held court for so many years. Despite the drizzle, a group of golfers at Hole 10 still navigated the nearly 6,400-yard course.

Inside the clubhouse, his presence emanated from the evidence of his success: plaques, trophies, a giant scorecard from his 1996 course-record game and an empty wall where a display in his honor is planned to be built.

"He was bigger than life," son Jonathan said at the Pine Knolls gathering. "With a driver in his hand, he could do about anything he wanted."

Pike was a "walking legend," according to Ryan Winfree, head golf professional at the Pine Knolls course. He won the club championship so many times, it was renamed the

Arlis Pike Cup, with a new crystal trophy called the “King’s Cup” on the way, Winfree added.

Pike had never played golf when he became a greenskeeper at Pine Knolls shortly after the course opened in 1969. But it didn’t take long for the game to become an obsession.

He would take shots in between watering the course. At home, he would hit at least 200 balls a day from a 58-yard green he landscaped, which included an elevated tee. Within a year of joining Pine Knolls, he began playing other golfers and entering amateur tournaments.

Longtime player and friend Marcus Gray described competing against Pike: “You feel like you got a little bit of a chance ... unless you’re playing Arlis.”

Anthony Pike, his other son, said Pike thrived on managing and creating pressure, playing with poise while talking “a little junk” to mess with the focus of other golfers.

He recalled a tournament when Pike upset the entire field with a five-shot lead after the first day and a quote in a newspaper article that read: “It’s like a bunch of pack mules chasing a thoroughbred.”



A golden era

Pike's game came of age during a golden era of amateur golf when official championships and unsanctioned betting were prolific, offering anyone with enough drive the opportunity to win big.

Michael Roland, a longtime fixture on the local golf circuit, remembers beating Pike in the first tournament they both played. The next year, Pike finished in first place.

"He respected everybody's game, but he wasn't afraid of anybody," Roland said.

Pike's biggest wins didn't come until later in life. In 1990, he won his first major local tournament at the Forsyth Championship. He claimed the trophy again in 1992 and 1995. During the same period, he became one of the oldest golfers to ever win the North Carolina Amateur.

In 1997, Pike became a professional golfer by joining the Senior PGA Tour, playing for around four years and qualifying for several tournaments. Between 2007 and 2017, Pike won the Forsyth Senior Championship and Carolinas Golf Association Super Senior Championship four times each.

He was also known to drum up bets on any occasion, from \$5 for sinking a putt to sometimes up to five-figure sums.

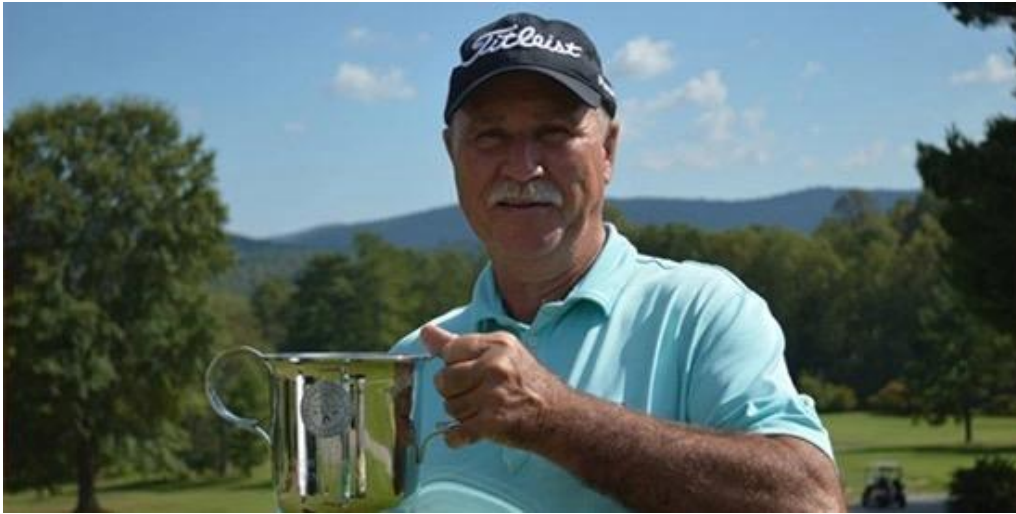
"He'd look at you and say, 'Hey, we need to do this for a little money and make this more interesting,' " said Steven Pegg, another longtime friend. "Later on down the road, we played for what could be considered a good bit of money."

Pike competed in what's known as "Calcutta" tournaments, where teams of golfers are auctioned as bets to raise money for a collective pot. One tournament in Myrtle Beach, which Pike won at least once, drew up to 50 teams and raised nearly \$2 million, with the winning team receiving around \$300,000.

"I don't know what the biggest bet he ever made was," Pegg said, "but one time I saw him walk away with a shoebox full of money, and it wasn't dollar bills or \$20 bills."

Off the course, Pike would make friendly wagers on pastimes such as shooting pool. He also raised beagles as hunting dogs and for field trial competitions, instigating bets for that as well, said Jason Motsinger, a friend and beagle trainer.

“We’d bet a bag of dog food on a football game,” he said.



‘Bring yourself back here’

Pike was a “hero” who was always there whenever needed, according to his grandson Luke.

He kept the names of his four grandchildren etched into his golf bag, attended as many of their sporting events as he could and regularly met them for breakfast or lunch at the Olympic Family Restaurant.

“He was one of my best friends,” Luke said.

For Anna Howerton, Pike was a mentor who “always supported me in golf.” He taught her how to drive, chip and putt as she grew up playing at Pine Knolls and attended her signing day ceremony when she decided to join the High Point University women’s golf team.

Howerton keeps the scorecard in her car from the last game she played with Pike after he became sick with a brain tumor. And she can still hear his voice when she needs advice in the middle of a game.

“When you’re in a tough spot, bring yourself back to where you’re comfortable,” Howerton recalls Pike saying. “And that would be going back to the Pine Knolls green. It’s where I learned how to play golf.”

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